

SIGHT & SOUND

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SIGHT & SOUND

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Associate Editor: John Pym
Designer: Geoff Wiggins
Publications Manager: John Smoker



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On the cover: Peter Postlethwaite and Freda Dowie in 'Distant Voices, Still Lives'. Photo: Mike Abrahams

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Little Red Ridinghood

Marta Meszaros and the malamute

For two decades, Marta Meszaros' stern pictures of life in Eastern Europe have been winning festival prizes and plaudits at women's cinema gatherings, without quite achieving a mainstream audience. But, East and West, this could be Meszaros' breakthrough year. The 56-year-old Hungarian director has been offered retrospectives in Moscow and Leningrad. Before *glasnost*, none of her films, with their pointed criticisms of Stalinist politics, had been allowed in the Soviet Union. And she has just finished shooting her first North American picture, *Little Red Ridinghood, Year 2000*. In this modern retelling of the fairytale, Ridinghood's divorced mother, a meteorologist, is transferred from the city to a post in a distant forest. Fantasy follows... The first Canadian-Hungarian co-production, *Red Ridinghood* is scheduled for release in North America early next year.

On a winter Sunday, Meszaros and her crew have set up shop on the eighteenth floor of a Montreal office building, tilting their camera through a plexiglass window towards the street far below. There half-a-dozen extras cluster at a crossing. On a diagonal corner, barely discernible, a silver four-legged creature also waits. The Wolf is poised for action on this grey, forbidding afternoon. 'Perhaps we should zoom in,' suggests a camera assistant. 'I don't think there's enough available light.' 'A zoom is not a good idea,' Meszaros barks in French. 'And of course there's enough light.'

The director prevails. Orders are transmitted by walkie-talkie, the camera rolls and the extras saunter across the street. Then the wolf crosses too, ears erect, nose and tail to the ground, and creeps past them. Even from eighteen floors up, it is eerie: the archetypal wild forest creature, down there in the modern city.

Later, the wolf—actually a malamute painted Tin Man silver—arrives by elevator, wagging its tail. 'Nice, Mookie,' says Meszaros, stroking the big, gentle Canadian dog. Originally, a Hungarian-bred German shepherd had been tried for the part, and failed. The two-country contract even stipulated, in fine print, the casting of a Hungarian dog. 'It's a co-production,' Meszaros shrugs.

For years, she has wanted to do a Red Ridinghood film. As a child, she adored the Grimm



Marta Meszaros with her Red Ridinghood, Fanny Lauzier.

Brothers version, in which the hunter rescues Ridinghood and her grandmother from the belly of the wolf. (In the earlier version by Charles Perrault, Ridinghood ends up eaten, and that's that.) But Meszaros feels a special, personal connection to this tale of a fatherless adolescent trying to make do in an alien world. 'I think all my films are about little girls who try to get to the other side of the forest unscathed.'

As she showed in the autobiographical *Diary for My Children*, Marta Meszaros' own father, a sculptor, was whisked away during her childhood. He died in a Soviet prison, a victim of Stalin's purges. Her mother died also, from typhoid, and the orphaned Marta was brought up in Budapest by a woman who was a zealous Communist bureaucrat. 'Children who have lost their parents have fantasies about what they look like,' says Meszaros. 'Since I don't know my father, I can give him any face I want.'

In *Diary for My Children*, Jan Nowicki played both the child's vision of her dead father and the real-life Communist partisan whom she loves. In *Red Ridinghood*, Nowicki plays the missing father, who has run off with a trapeze artist, and also the 'rescuer' hunter in the forest. (Changed in the ecological updating to an ornithologist.) Finally, Nowicki's eyes will be transported to the face of the wolf, which in Meszaros' version is both good and bad, and also a

sort of father figure. 'It's not because I live with Nowicki that I think only Laurence Olivier is like him on stage,' says Meszaros. Nowicki has appeared in every film she has made in the last twelve years, the most fervent symbiotic relationship between a male star and his female director since the mid-70s heyday of Giancarlo Giannini and Lina Wertmüller.

Indeed, *Red Ridinghood* is a family affair. The second-unit camerawork is handled by Meszaros' stepson, Nyika Jancsó, the son of her second husband, Miklós Jancsó. Many of the crew are old friends from Budapest, including Thomas Vamos, the director of photography, a National Film Board film-maker who emigrated to Canada twenty-five years ago. And it's not unusual to catch others of the Meszaros extended clan buzzing about the set. Those who were on the Budapest part of the *Red Ridinghood* shoot claim to have seen a possible women's film-making 'first': Meszaros directing her movie one afternoon with a granddaughter sitting on her knee.

How informal is she? At Montreal's Dorval Airport, she photographs Red Ridinghood and her mother buying tickets for their forest destination without even telling the extras behind them that the camera is running. When she shoots a scene with a camera-shy 6-year-old Ridinghood, Meszaros chats with her crew while the actress playing the mother, Pamela Collyer,

directs the little girl. 'Play with your baby lamb and think of daddy left behind,' coaxes Collyer, as the director sits by.

Red Ridinghood is part of the Quebec producer Rock Demers' ambitious package of family films, *Tales for All*. He is thrilled to have brought Marta Meszaros into the *Tales for All* fold, and hopes her name may bring new audiences to his series, especially in American theatres where they have yet to catch on, in spite of successes in the video and cable markets. 'A great hit? I never think about it,' says Meszaros. 'But this is an international story and perhaps it will touch people. I think European children will be interested, but Americans want strong action. And there's American TV, which I watch for my English language. It's killing literature, culture and movies too. American television is like Soviet propaganda. In Russia, it's "I love Communism, Socialism, building a new country." In America, it's "I love war, violence, money." And *Dynasty* is to me like Dostoevsky—about terrible people.'

GERALD PEARY

Hong Kong

Storm in a China teacup

The Hong Kong film festival this year suffered a storm in a China teacup on opening night. The gala attraction was to have been Chen Kaige's *King of the Children*. But Cannes coveted it, too, and used its superior clout on the festival circuit to deny Hong Kong the screening. In inviting Chen's film, Cannes reminded China that it would be disqualified if it had previously been shown elsewhere than in its country of origin.

China sorely needs hard currency and Cannes is where the most lucrative distribution deals are struck. Pleas by telephone and telex were of no avail. For the Hong Kong festival, *King of the Children* was a non-starter. But it ought not to have been. Who said Hong Kong was foreign soil? Wasn't one of the points of the 1997 agreement that Hong Kong has always been part of China and Britain merely the leaseholder? Ironically, none of the private screenings of the film that were promptly set up outside the festival counted in Cannes' terms. Can there be logic in that?

King of the Children turns out to be Chen's best film to date. It is taken from a novella by Ah Cheng set during the Cultural Revolution and charts the efforts of a village teacher to persuade his pupils to express their own opinions instead of regurgitating

those they have read in books or newspapers. Highly critical of the Chinese educational system and the way it has stifled independent thought, it is a film with something to say and the skill to convey it eloquently in pictures and words. The very settings—the misty village, with its gnarled, withered tree stumps, a burning hillside and the sounds of distant tree-felling—become potent emblems of waste, decay and the need to make a fresh start.

It is an intellectually tougher Chinese film than the one Hong Kong chose to wind up the festival. *Red Sorghum*, which had already won top prize at Berlin, is the first film by Zhang Yimou, China's leading cameraman, and for his directorial debut he is backed by another great photographer, Gu Changwei, who also shot *King of the Children*. Both films look extraordinary: unforgettable shots of lowering skies, blood-red sunsets and fibrillating sorghum fields burn themselves into the mind. But where Chen bends them to critical ends, Zhang sometimes seems in love with the images themselves.

From Taiwan, *Daughter of the Nile* finds Hou Hsiao-hsien straddled uneasily between commercial pressures and his own more contemplative manner. Much of the film bears a family likeness to *Dust in the Wind*—notably Hou's distant, almost Olympian detachment and his penchant for framing action in long shot through an open door. But part of the deal with the Tsung Yi production company was to make a more commercial picture about youth, starring the popular singer Yang Lin. So *Daughter of the Nile* has comic-book elements, too. There are shoot-'em-ups and bar-room scenes filmed in lurid primary colours that sit oddly with the more realistic scenes of domestic life.

Hong Kong itself made a mixed showing, with a surfeit of gangland melodramas and a three-hour kung-fu spectacle from Ann Hui—*The Romance of Book and Sword*, adapted from a popular novel by Jin Yung. It seems not to have pleased local audiences, who resented the compression and loss of character and incident even in so long a film. Western audiences will miss the delirious poetry that King Hu once brought to this kind of subject. The second part, though, set among China's minority peoples, is livelier, culminating in an intriguing sports encounter—part soccer match, part hockey and played on ice skates on a frozen pond.

Lee Chang-ho's *A Man with Three Coffins* is one of those on-the-road Korean melodramas

shot in portentous filters that suffer from delusions of significance: lots of references to knotty problems like reunification, a convoluted plot in which a man plays inadvertent exterminating angel to three young women he meets en route and a sudden descent into shamanism and black magic at the end. Taradiddle!

So, too, though more enjoyable in its preposterous way, is the new film by Toshio Matsumoto, director all those years ago of *Pandemonium*. *Abracadabra* is adapted from a classic 1935 novel by Kyusaku Yumeno—a story of lunacy, murder and shifting reality, in which a young man believes he is the reincarnation of a painter who specialised in depicting the disintegrating flesh of rotting corpses. Akin to *A Crazy Page*, with a hint, perhaps, of Caligari, its blacker-than-black humour is not everybody's cup of poisoned sake.

Remembrance, an autobiographical first feature by playwright Takehiro Nakajima, is a rite-of-passage story set in the 1950s and shot in the uncluttered style that was popular then (though with franker sex scenes). Kinoshita, one feels, might have filmed it in those days. It's an old-fashioned picture (in the best sense) and a worthy latecomer to that humanist vein in Japanese cinema that has lately fallen into disrepair.

The best Japanese film in Hong Kong, though, was a documentary—Sumiko Haneda's funny and compassionate *How to Care for the Senile*. With life expectancy now set at 80, Japan faces a growing problem of what to do about the mentally confused, examples of which are

seen in the film. Miss Haneda's message is simple and cogently argued: laugh with these old people, humour them if you will, but never forget that their emotions are unimpaired. So respect their feelings. It's an eminently responsible theme and Miss Haneda's sympathetic shooting style does it justice.

ALAN STANBROOK

Montreal

Boom business for the art film

Montreal is, rather surprisingly, the home of no fewer than five different film festivals every year. And the most different is undoubtedly the Festival International du Film sur l'Art, which reached its sixth in March. The ordinary moviegoer might wonder whether there was enough material in this specialised field to support a week-long festival each year—let alone the several similar festivals which have sprung up in Paris, Barcelona and elsewhere. But this year Montreal came up with 85 films and videos (films in the vast majority) as well as a two-programme tribute to jury-member Barbara Rose, showing five of her films on art and artists.

Nor were they all little slips of a thing: admittedly, at 176 minutes Jacques Barsac's ponderous *Le Corbusier* (fancy computer animation on unrealised projects and all) was an exceptionally long haul, but there were documentary and docudrama features for virtually every programme, and the average length of film was probably around the half-hour mark.

One reason for this enormous

amount of material is of course the growth of the video market in the last five years. Original videos themselves have not been, up to now, encouraged at the festival, partly because the visual quality is generally felt to be not up to that of a 35mm film. But even that is changing, and in the cinema of the ONF the festival now has nearly ideal circumstances for projecting video, so the feeling is that the preference for videos which are really films, transferred to video for the final editing, will gradually be modified, and the separate prize category for videos suppressed.

In a more general sense, the expanding use of video, commercially and educationally, has undoubtedly encouraged many film-makers to work on art subjects, so that it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish what is a 'film for television' and what is not. Is, for example, Peter Schamoni's elegant (and scholarly) *Casper David Friedrich: Grenzen der Zeit*, which won the prize for the best dramatised biography, a film for theatres or television? It was produced by a film company and has been theatrically released, but a heavy injection of funds from Bavarian Television obviously implies something else in the film-maker's considerations.

The festival takes place in three small (300/400 seats) but luxuriously equipped cinemas, in the Cinémathèque Québécoise, the Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Office National du Film, to mostly capacity audiences: clearly five festivals is by no means too many for Montreal. The base of this festival has been broadened through the years to admit films on the arts in general, and in fact it was an

Toshio Matsumoto's *Abracadabra*.



Australian film on a writer, Christina Wilcox's *The Nights Belong to the Novelist*, evoking with dazzling aplomb the life and fictional world of the housewife-novelist Elisabeth Jolley, which won the Grand Prix. (The enthusiasm with which this, turning on a very precise recognition of tone and nuance in the English language, was received is a tribute to the linguistic skills at the disposal of audiences at this francophone festival in a bilingual city.) Other big public successes were chalked up by Tony Palmer's rather one-sided *Maria*, a personal portrait of Callas, and the Franco-Italian *The Thrill of Genius: Alfred Hitchcock*, fascinating on a personal level and at the same time an awful warning against automatically believing first-hand testimony, since nearly all the tottering stars assembled cheerfully retail major, demonstrable errors of fact with every air of authority.

In general, the festival contained its fair measure of stodge, or silliness fallen into in a desperate attempt to avoid being stodgy, along with the occasional clearly insufficient work from an underdeveloped country, included, presumably, *pour encourager les autres*. But it is very noticeable that technical standards are uniformly high—it is no longer sufficient defence of a limping entry to say that it looks wonderful, because in these days of commercial and pop-video apprenticeship practically everything does. And the astonishing comeback made by Art in popular consciousness during the 1980s is clearly reflected in the

films people make about it. Would you believe that a half-hour film about a particular kind of photographic printing, the secret (not herein revealed) of one family, could keep a general audience continuously on the edge of its seat? Well, Jean Real's *Le Procédé Fresson*, which won the Special Jury Prize, does just that. It was special, all right, but not in the final analysis all that special.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Berlin

A celebration of colour

It is particularly satisfying—as happened this year in Berlin—when one's favourite films win the major prizes at a festival. The Silver Bear went to Alexandre Askoldov's *Komissar*, made in 1987, but not released in the Soviet Union until Christmas Day, 1987 (see SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1987/88). The Golden Bear, in yet another example of the irresistible ascension of cinema from the People's Republic of China, was awarded to *Red Sorghum*. This is Zhang Yimou's first film as director, though he has worked as a lighting cameraman since 1982, most notably on *Yellow Earth* (1984), and as both co-lighting cameraman and leading player in *The Old Well* (1987), which recently won, ex aequo, the Grand Prize at the Salsomaggiore festival. Nearly 50, Zhang Yimou has since 1983 been director of cinema studies at what would seem to be China's most dynamic studio: Xian.

The chilling plot of *Red Sorghum* concerns a lovely young woman who has been sold, for the price of a donkey, to be the wife of a much older man—and, worse, a leper. Perhaps out of a sense of propriety, we never see the leper, and fortunately for the young lady the marriage itself is never consummated. Why? Because the husband-to-be disappears, bafflingly. The press synopsis reveals that this is an autobiographical film: that the young woman was the director's mother and the peasant who protects and loves her, and by whom she has a child conceived in the sorghum field, was his father.

The Scope and Technicolor photography (not by the director) is breathtaking, and the climax in which the Japanese destroy the sorghum field to build a road and, as a warning, order the town animal-skinner to flay alive two resisting Chinese is both stunning and unbearable. For a first feature, this is a tour de force.

The only film to uphold the crumbling reputation of the New German Cinema was Rosa von Praunheim's *Anita: Dances of Vice*, out of competition and relegated to the catch-all Panorama. It is based very loosely on the life of Anita Berber, a dancer who scandalised Berlin in the inflationary 20s by her naked dancing and colourful private life. The real Anita Berber also appeared in several silent films. Our film begins with an imaginary Anita (the real one is long dead) confronting the Berlin of today, an old woman who still wants to take her clothes off in

public. Carted off to a mental hospital, she contemptuously spurns the thorazine they try to give her and grandly insists on cocaine! cocaine! cocaine! The film contains frequent flashbacks and I know no other which so effectively captures the subversive sleaze and revolutionary raunch of Berlin in the 20s. What a *Cabaret von Praunheim* could have made.

The honour of the French New Wave was saved by Luc Moullet, whose *La Comédie du Travail* was shown in the Forum of Young Films. It's not so much about work as unemployment, and it explains why, under French bureaucracy, it's as tiring to collect unemployment benefits as it is to work, especially for the professional non-employee. Brechtian in conception, this is Moullet at his sharpest and most entertaining: subversion with a smile.

Berlin is the last of the major festivals to put on full-dress retrospectives, and this year's was devoted to Colour and Film. Most appropriate, with all the hullabaloo over colorisation. Needless to say, one can be against colorisation and yet recognise that colour has been with us for a very long time. From the very beginning, in fact, with those delightfully unrealistic hand-painted films of Méliès. A well-known French critic made a fool of himself by saying in a report on a screening at last summer's Avignon festival of a tinted and toned print of *Intolerance* that it would have made Griffith turn in his grave. But then almost all silent films were tinted and toned, except in the Soviet Union. (Chaplin and Keaton? It seems perhaps that they were not.) Then came, long before *Becky Sharp* in 1934, two-colour Technicolor.

Much beloved black and white really only dates back to the coming of sound, and lasted only until the early 50s, with some notable exceptions, of course. None the less, those were twenty glorious years which must not be lost to posterity. The one area not covered by the retrospective was that weird phenomenon, the film in sepia. Many people say they have never seen a film in sepia, and perhaps they were not shown that way in Europe. But I know that a film such as *Suez* was shown in the United States in sepia; and I'm pretty sure that *Cabin in the Sky* was as well. We saw some beautifully restored colour prints—the NFA's *Red Shoes* and USC's *A Star Is Born* (the Wellman/Gaynor/March version)—but it is ironic that the best colour film at Berlin was *Red Sorghum*. The reason: China has the last functioning all-Technicolor lab in the world.

RICHARD ROUD

Red Sorghum.



Under the Bed

Special effects from the Children's Film Unit

Hands rustle the 'monster'—a black polythene bag bedecked with rubbish—and a puff of scented smoke adds atmosphere. In a borrowed terraced house in Battersea, South London, the Children's Film Unit is midway through a heavy schedule—some ten minutes of finished film shot each day—on their eleventh production. This is a Channel 4 commission, budget £33,000, and only the CFU's second outside script. The premiere will be at the Odeon, Leicester Square, in September.

Under the Bed is one of a series of 'Scary Tales' written by the actress Laura Beaumont and her husband Bill Oddie: ten-year-old Felicity inadvertently breeds a monster, Heap, from the household junk cast heedlessly under her bed... Laura Beaumont is on hand for the shooting, though, like the only other visible adult, the director Colin Finbow, the Unit's founder and driving force, she is keeping a discreetly low profile.

The CFU registered as an educational charity in 1981, following the immense success of *The Custard Boys*, a movie about wartime evacuees made by the pupils of Forest Hill School, South East London, where Colin Finbow was then an English teacher. Its films have since then been regularly seen on the festival circuit, from Cannes to Moscow, and several have been showcased at the ICA in London—and this notwithstanding that the Unit only last year acquired its first permanent production office, a pocket-sized room in a complex of artisan studios off the Queenstown Road, Battersea, and that all its films are edited on a bench in Colin Finbow's Sidcup home. It employs only one full-time co-ordinator, Brianne Perkins—who, to make ends meet, moonlights one day a week as financial controller for a brokerage firm.

The Unit, patron David Puttnam, former head of Columbia Pictures, has scooped funds from wherever it could find them: Channel 4, ILÉA, the Greater London Arts Association, Gulbenkian, the Sir John Cass Foundation—£1,000 from John Lewis. Distribution for all the films—from *Captain Stirrict* (1981), a musical about a gang of pickpockets in Victorian London, through *School for Vandals* (1986), a Famous Five-style spoof, to *Infantile Disorders* (1987), warfare between rival groups of carol singers—is hand-



The Children's Film Unit:
Ben Wheeler, Leo Osterreith, Andrew McCormack.

led by Channel 4's agents Richard Price Associates. One of the Unit's productions, a short documentary, *Time to Talk* (1986), was a commission from the Samaritans and is now used nationwide as a teaching aid for prospective counsellors.

The CFU's 50-60 members (equally divided between boys and girls) are aged between 7 and 16: if a place exists on one of the regular Saturday workshops (membership £6 a year, £1 a session), they will take you—but to qualify for a place on the film unit, regular attendance at the workshops is required, and the classes, taught by professionals, are four to six hours each. Each August the Unit is billeted at a school in Seaford, Sussex, to make the 'summer film': this year it is to be the Channel 4 commission, *Hard Road*, about tearaways from different family backgrounds making off to the bright lights of Brighton.

What did some of tomorrow's film-makers think of the Unit's resolutely old technology? (*Under the Bed* was being shot mute with a 16mm Arriflex which had seen some service.) Paul Adams, 16, was taking time off as an administrative assistant at a business information house to work as 2nd assistant director. He had been writing scripts for five years and rated the CFU experience invaluable. 'Fewer characters, and action shots over dialogue, that's one lesson I've learned.' Jonathan Aird, 12½, soundman, was a devotee of video, but managed a trip to the cinema every two

weeks. *Teen Wolf Too* and *Spaceballs* were recent favourites; and he'd sneaked in to *Wish You Were Here*.

Jack Harvey, 13, whose parents are in the film business, said firmly that he disliked video. He loved *Nightmare on Elm Street 3* (on which his mother was line producer). Thomas Arnold, 10, a member of the St Michael's School drama club in Highgate, who was playing George, the heroine's brother, confessed that his family did not actually own a video. His favourite movies? *E.T.* and *Back to the Future*. He had been cast, unusually, from outside the Unit (but was now firmly committed to it) since there was no one from the acting workshop who looked quite right or was the necessary size. 'It's a shame,' he said, 'that they're running out of money.'

'I'm proud,' Colin Finbow said, 'that despite the constant turnaround of crews we have managed to maintain pretty good artistic standards. We are getting known—these days we're not so often confused with the Children's Film Foundation, which has its backing taken care of. Money is always a problem, but we stick at it: the London Boroughs' Scheme recently turned down our application for £20,000, which would really have put us on a firm footing. We didn't fit their profile, which is standard—but then we're unique. How did we get the Odeon, Leicester Square? The manager thought we were doing a good job.'

JOHN PYM

Dutch revival

Canal corpses, letters home...

The most conspicuous event in the Dutch film world this spring was the launch, just after the Rotterdam festival, of Dick Maas' thriller *Amsterdamned*. It opened in a blaze of publicity that quite eclipsed the festival coverage; a surprising contrast in a country where the cinema receives extensive state aid, justified largely on cultural grounds.

After a long period of decline, Dutch cinema admissions increased slightly in 1987 and in the first months of 1988 were up by a dramatic 25 per cent. Five Dutch films were among the fourteen top-earners last year and export hopes were raised when the 1987 Oscar for best foreign film went to Fons Rademaker's *The Assault*.

Rademaker is one of the few Dutch film-makers who already has a reputation abroad, but it is widely predicted that the names behind *Amsterdamned* will soon be familiar. Dick Maas, a graduate of the Dutch Film Academy, made his first feature, *The Lift*, in 1983. First Floor Features, the company he formed with producer Laurens Geels, was responsible for two of last year's most successful films: *Abel*, directed by Alex van Warmerdam, plays with sexual ambiguities in a family where the grown-up son refuses to leave home; while Maas' *Flodder* is a broad farce about a 'problem' family rehoused in an up-market middle-class estate.

Amsterdamned itself is a polished thriller, an excellent advertisement for its Dutch technicians, about a group of murders committed by a diver lurking in the canals of Amsterdam. It required realistic corpses, an elaborate sewer set, extensive underwater shooting and spectacular chases, all achieved on a budget said to be around £1.4m. It is self-consciously a genre picture and so full of quotations from film classics, not to mention references to famous paintings, that watching it is a bit like participating in a visual quiz. From the export point of view, however, the snag may be that it is a little too like the American product it emulates.

The same cannot be said of *Hersenschimmen* (*Mind Shadows*), a new film which despite minimal publicity has attracted considerable attention. The first feature by Peruvian-born director Heddy Honigman, and based on a novel by J. Bernlef, it follows the disintegration of a man suffering from Alzheimer's disease. The central character,

powerfully played by Joop Admiraal, is a retired Dutch businessman who has settled with his wife in Canada. It is winter; their house is isolated and the blanks in Martin's memory are echoed by the empty white landscape.

Surprisingly, *Mind Shadows* is far from depressing. The story is not presented as a clinical or social study, and although it may encourage a sympathetic attitude to patients, it is not a campaigning work. The film focuses on the nature of memory itself and how it makes possible the construction of personal identity. Throughout, the viewpoint is that of Martin.

Mind Shadows was financed mainly from a state scheme designed to encourage films of artistic merit. At the moment, however, television seems to offer rather more encouragement for adventurous and risky projects. It has, for instance, up to now been the main outlet and an important source of backing for the work of the Hague production group Meatball. The group consists of four film-makers organised as a non-profit cultural foundation which, for some fifteen years, has been building a reputation for surprising and innovative work.

Meatball is best known outside Holland for *Dutch Moves* (1986), produced by them but directed by the Yugoslav Delibor Martinis. However, a production which thoroughly deserves to be seen abroad is Rien Hagen's *New York Batavia*, which won the Dutch documentary prize last autumn. This remarkable study of the last years of Dutch rule in Indonesia is based on letters which passed between a Dutch official sent back to Indonesia at the end of the war and his wife who was left waiting for news with their children in a New York hotel.

The unique quality of *New York Batavia* is achieved by a number of self-imposed limitations. Except for a few words of essential information and some newsreel commentary, the soundtrack (there is a well-translated English version) consists entirely of extracts from the letters. The central characters are never shown, only their point of view—mainly of the interiors where they read and write the letters, just occasionally of another person, an official, a servant, a friend.

The existing co-operation between television and cinema is obviously important for both. There was some television money in *Mind Shadows* and Meatball is planning a tv-financed 35mm film. In April a third television channel started broadcasting, but it is too early yet to say how this will affect

film-makers. In theory the new channel, which has a brief both to show cultural programmes and to serve minorities, should be good news for film-makers who choose to swim against the commercial tide. But its funds are very limited and its airtime is committed far ahead . . . a familiar story?

MARGARET DICKINSON

San Francisco

Investigative freedom East and West

Crime and punishment was the focus of several recent documentaries at the 31st San Francisco International Film Festival; and by zeroing in on shocking, even sensational stories, they goaded audiences into a consideration of broader social questions. The most visually striking was Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line*, a whodunit documentary which questions the guilt of a man jailed for murder. Framed in the film noir manner, it also draws on other elements of the fiction film: the murder is re-enacted and repeatedly played, not just for elucidation but to build the drama. The climax is a taped confession (of sorts) by another man: a stylish work, down to its serial music, which could make *cinéma-vérité* look somewhat old-fashioned.

Since it implies that the wrong man was convicted, *The Thin Blue Line* sows doubt about the working of the us justice system. In this, it is similar to another us documentary, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1988) by Christine Choy and Renee Tajima, about the murder of an Asian-

American. At the time of the killing, Detroit workers were angry about the effect of Japanese competition on the auto industry, and the Vincent Chin case raised the question of racism—a spectre which the film addresses. Plea-bargaining considerably reduced the murderer's sentence, a fact that the victim's immigrant mother cannot accept, and her wordless grief forms the film's emotional centre.

Violence is also a source of fascination and horror for Polish documentary-maker Marcel Lozinski. In *Witnesses—Kielce, 1987* (1988), he interviews Poles about an anti-Semitic pogrom which occurred in their town in 1946. When two children were found dead in a lime pit, it was said that Jews had taken their blood, and that became the reason for the killing of 42 people and the wounding of 67 others. Like *Shoah*, *Witnesses* suggests that these prejudices have not died out: one priest says that it's possible that in the Middle Ages, weaker races took the blood of stronger ones to enrich themselves.

Another Polish work, Robert Glinski's *Sunday Pranks*, also creates a chilling feeling about the present while concentrating on the past. This 60-minute fiction film, set in Warsaw on the day of Stalin's death, presents the games of young children. Stalin may be gone, but the children have already assimilated the features of his rule: blackmail, informing, the victimisation of those who appear strange. Small wonder that this film was held up since 1983.

Although previously shelved films are currently in demand, the complexity of past censorship

The Swimmer.

has rarely been explained in the United States, so San Francisco performed a service by inviting Soviets who differentiated the more repressive Ukraine from the relatively liberal republic of Georgia. Ukrainian Yuri Ilyenko was on hand to elucidate 'poetic cinema', which he worked out with Paradjanov. As the Ukrainian political climate froze, this stylistic description became a term of abuse, and Ilyenko's *Well for the Thirsty* (1965) was declared 'formalist' and 'anti-Soviet' and released only last year.

A better creative atmosphere existed in Georgia, Irakli Kvirikadze explained. *The Swimmer*, which Kvirikadze finished in 1981, was accepted there by Gruziafilm studio and the republic's branch of the film agency Goskino. Moscow Goskino generally presented more problems for Georgian directors and, in fact, its deputy chairman declared that *The Swimmer* should be burned. But, after negotiations, it was released in 1984 with scenes about the Stalin era cut. These Kvirikadze preserved, and the restored version was released in 1987. This story of the degeneration of a family of swimmers contradicts the belief that the Soviet era was characterised by upward progress. And it shows that denunciations sometimes resulted from personal jealousies: after a boy drops a bust of Stalin into an aquarium, his father is taken away forever because a rival reports the incident.

While Kvirikadze is a consummate storyteller, his colleague Aleksandr Rekhviashvili adeptly handles religious symbolism. Rekhviashvili's *The Way Home*, set in the Georgian past, concerns a young man who is lost in a forest dotted with ruined churches, signs of Christianity in decay. Decent men of learning and chuckling slaveholders come in threes, as in parables, and the innocent hero becomes a disciple of the former and a victim of the latter. Dressed like a novitiate, and perhaps the last righteous man, he is condemned to death for carrying privately printed heretical books on good and evil.

Perhaps the censors who gave *The Way Home* an extremely limited release in 1981 took it as an allegory about *samizdat*. (The film was reportedly re-released in 1987.) Rekhviashvili's *Georgian Chronicle of the 19th Century* (1979), also screened at San Francisco, contains a martyr-hero, too, but that character's 'progressive' politics probably made him more acceptable to Goskino. It's impressive that, before Gorbachev, Gruziafilm permitted Rekhviashvili's darker *The Way Home* to be made at all.

KAREN ROSENBERG



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DIRECTOR'S RIGHTS AND *Copyright*

A PARABLE OF COPYRIGHT

And Moses went up into the great mountain where God spake unto him saying: 'Moses, here is a parchment on which is written ten commandments; take it and read them to the Children of Israel so that they shall know that I am God the Creator.' Moses turned with a glad heart and started off down the mountain, but God called after him: 'Hang on a tick, Mo,' (for they were still on speaking terms), 'a priest from another religion might steal the parchment and pretend that my words came from some Philistine god. Give me back the parchment.'

Moses looked on in disbelief as God ripped up the parchment and wrote the commandments on two huge tablets of stone. The old man was stunned: 'Why give me trouble, Lord?' he inquired. 'I'm over 100, I have a bad back and rheumatism and you give me this lot to carry down the mountain.' And God roared loudly and angrily unto Moses: 'I, the Lord, am a jealous God,' and he spake the eleventh commandment: 'Thou shalt not copy.'

This encounter led to the famous Yiddish joke—look after the residuals and the morals will look after themselves.

C

opyright sounds like one of the most boring subjects on God's earth; it conjures images of dusty law books and legal minutiae. However, although copyright law breeds the second most boring type of person in the world—copyright lawyers—the moral and commercial issues surrounding the right to copy are fascinating. Copyright law fuses culture and industry by facilitating the distribution of creative work while protecting the livelihoods of creators and authors from those who would copy their work without payment; it expresses the notion that a work of the mind is property in the same way as is a car, house, factory or field; and it negotiates between individual rights to ownership of intellectual property and the need for the dissemination of knowledge and culture within societies.

Copyright is also a key issue in the development of a modern industrial system: one brute fact places copyright law at the forefront of industrial development in the United Kingdom, namely, at a conservative estimate the copyright industries contribute more than two per cent of the UK's gross domestic product. To put this in perspective, this means that the copyright industries, book, periodical and newspaper publishing, music publishing and performance, sound recordings, film, video, broadcasting and the theatre, contributed around £6 billion to the economy in 1985, more than car manufacture, the chemical industry, the food industry, and almost as much as mechanical and electrical engineering. Copyright law regulates the size and allocation of the slices of this very big cake; consequently it is the site of extremely complex and arcane debates about what is an author or creator, who has rights and what rights they should have.

Two further ingredients must be added to this potent and volatile mixture. First, although new delivery systems, such as cable and satellite, add to the possible sources of revenue for a copyright holder, they complicate the process of collecting that revenue. The transmission of British programmes throughout Europe on SuperChannel and Sky means that British rights holders have to negotiate with European collection agencies if they are to be paid for the transmission. Secondly, the EEC is attempting to harmonise Europe into one market by 1992 and, as a result, the British Government is anxious to bring our copyright laws into line with those of mainland Europe.

Copyright legislation has to resolve these new and difficult issues. An indication of the new-found status of copyright law was provided in Barcelona last year at the conference of the European Federation of Audiovisual

Film-makers (FERA). Jane Ginsberg, a lecturer in copyright law at New York's Columbia University, pointed out that in the past her colleagues had found her specialism 'bohemian' (translation: 'Don't call us, we'll call you'). They now consider it to be the 'coming' area (translation: 'What are you doing for dinner?').

The British Government has at long last made up its mind about a revision of the 1956 Copyright Act. The Copyright, Design and Patents Bill, which received its second reading in April, is the product of long and tortuous deliberation. Indeed, the preparations for a new act have been under way since 1973, when the Heath Government announced the establishment of a committee under the chairmanship of Mr Justice Whitford, to consider whether to change the 1956 Act. In 1977 the Whitford Committee published its report on Copyright and Designs Law, which was quickly followed up by the 1981 Green Paper outlining the Thatcher Government's views on Whitford. The process speeded up somewhat when Sir Robin Nicholson's report on intellectual property and industrial development fed into the 1983 Green Paper on Intellectual Property Rights and Innovation. By 1985, the Government was in a position to publish its Green Paper on Recording and Rental of Audio and Visual Copyright Material; which led in turn, as these things do, to the White Paper on Copyright of 1986 and the Bill of 1987, which has yet to become law. So, a mere fifteen years after the announcement of Whitford, we have still to settle finally the future of copyright law in the UK.

One would have thought, after this long and arduous process of sifting evidence; outlining the various pros and analysing the possible cons; and exploring the frightening but fascinating implications of new technologies, that the bill would have simply dotted the i's and crossed the t's. However, the most interesting part of the story was kept until the end. At the very last gasp, the Government decided that it would introduce the concept of director's moral rights into UK copyright and, intriguingly, allow directors to be legally defined as the co-authors of a film or television programme.

To appreciate the radical nature of this proposal, we have to understand the differences between the Anglo-American philosophy of copyright and that of Continental Europe. The bill bestowed on these new-found authors several rights which had been commonplace in Europe but which were anathema to British law. There are profound philosophical differences between the two systems. The English and American laws are

extremely positivistic: a right is what civil law recognises at a particular place and time. European law, on the other hand, is grounded in the belief that there is something intrinsically significant about the relationship between a person and the thing which they produce. To say of something: 'This is mine,' is, according to this perspective, to attribute an indissoluble bond between the object and the person. The Europeans carry over the broad idea of human rights into copyright: the author has moral rights which are, in the French version, inalienable. Moral rights tend to encompass the right to make the work public (*droit de divulgation*); the right to claim authorship (*droit à la paternité*); and, finally, the right to prevent alterations that may damage the author's reputation (*droit au respect de l'œuvre*).

The Anglo-American approach, which is based on the right to copy as opposed to author's rights, has, until now, been fundamentally agnostic with regard to human rights over creative works. A copyright work produced by an employee of a broadcasting organisation, film company, newspaper or magazine belongs to the proprietor. Similarly, the person who commissions a photograph, a portrait or an engraving owns the copyright to that work and can do whatever they want with it.

By this criterion, the creative authors of, say, *The Singing Detective* are to be treated no differently from the people who compile the listings for the *Radio Times*; both works belong to the BBC, which can resell them to whomsoever it wishes (within the confines of the contract); or, if it took it into its collective mind, cut them in two and print them backwards. In British law, then, legal subjects, who are held to be the makers of a copyright work, are not necessarily human beings. And, if they are not human then the idea of moral rights in copyright law is clearly ludicrous.

Faced with this utilitarian and pragmatic understanding of copyright law, British and American film, television and theatre directors have been lobbying hard for legislation to bring the law into line with that of Continental Europe. Specifically, they want the *droit au respect de l'œuvre*, to give them more control over their work. There are two main reasons for this new-found militancy among directors. First, they have become increasingly organised in recent years, with the Directors Guild of Great Britain (which was formed in 1982) providing a forum for debate and a focus for a sense of professional identity. Secondly, they have witnessed the increasing number of ways in which their films are being changed and, in the directors' eyes, perverted. Directors have long expected (although not accepted) the cavalier interruption of a film by advertisements. They have also had to become accustomed to the crass

and unsympathetic re-editing of their films for television, the most common form being that of panning and scanning, which reshapes the content and balance of a film frame in order to make it fit the TV screen (see *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1987/88).

Their frustration has been building for many years; but the issue which ignited a long and sustained howl of protest was that of colorisation. Colorising a black and white film is a little like someone painting by numbers over Picasso's 'Guernica', with only the six-colour paintbox available to him. Actually, it would not matter if the painter had every colour under the sun available; painting over 'Guernica' to make it more 'lifelike' would simply miss the point. Similarly, adding colour to *Citizen Kane* or *Sunset Boulevard*, or, for that matter, *Raging Bull* and *Manhattan*, undermines the lighting, focus and balance of each and every image. There are good economic reasons for colorisation; not only do the films have a new lease of public life and sell reasonably well, but if the owner of the copyright can demonstrate that the coloured film has been creatively altered (is in effect a new creation), then it attracts its own copyright. When the monochrome classic is no longer copyright, then at least the rights holder has some property left.

Colorisation has forced the pace of directors' protests. Many, including Woody Allen and Sydney Pollack, have appeared before the US Congress to support Congressman Richard Gephardt's proposal which would protect films from arbitrary alteration. And in September last year a delegation of directors, including many of the Hollywood heavyweights, presented a petition to the House Judiciary Committee outlining demands for the protection of their films. In the UK, the Directors Guild has been harassing the DTI for years about moral rights and FERA, spurred on by the French Copyright Act of 1985, which firmed up director's rights, has been lobbying for a toughening up of the right of redress for directors. Even though the concept of director's rights is enshrined in Continental copyright law, TV companies continue to pan and scan and cut wherever and whatever they feel like. Franco Zeffirelli was so incensed by the transmission of *Romeo and Juliet*, which had as much advertising time as film, that he took the network to court for defamation of his work and won. None the less, this is an isolated victory and films continue to be cut to pieces.

Directors are pushing for the identification and articulation of their moral rights. Recently FERA presented a declaration of dissent about the use of films on TV; in particular, it emphasised that an audiovisual work must be preserved as the expression of the personality of its creator, and therefore that

FERA was opposed to any mutilation or deformation of the work or its spirit; to any interruption of the work which did not have the consent of or was not intended by its creators; to any change in format and to the suppression of credit titles. On the surface, it looks as if the Government's new broadcasting bill has assented to these demands. Articles 69 and 72 state that the director of a copyright film has the right to be identified as the author or director of the work and the right not to have his (*sic*) work subjected to unjustified modification. The bill continues: 'a modification is justified only if it is reasonable in the circumstances and is not prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author or director' (clause 72: 6b).

This apparent shift to the idea of moral rights is in fact chimerical. The bill immediately undermines the notion in the clauses 73 and 77. The former makes it quite clear that directors who are employed by institutions or producers (who are still considered the authors of the film) have no moral rights over modification. The latter states: 'It is not an infringement of any of the rights conferred by this Chapter to do any act to which the person entitled to the right has consented.' It continues: 'Any of those rights may be waived by instrument in writing signed by the person giving up the right.' Furthermore, the bill notes that a director may waive his or her rights conditionally or *unconditionally* (my emphasis). The fundamental problem is that most directors do not have the economic power to withstand the pressures from production companies which would require them to waive their rights. A right is illusory if it cannot be exercised easily. Clearly the Government was more concerned about the superficial harmonisation of British copyright law with that of the mainland than with the mutilation of audiovisual works.

The Directors Guild and the ACTT have attacked the bill for its legal chicanery, but the problem is that this sleight of hand reveals some of the profound difficulties with the idea of director's rights. Quite simply, it might well be that there is no moral argument in favour of these rights, and that directors may have to look elsewhere for the protection of their films.

What is a right? Fundamentally, we claim a right on the basis of some special attribute which we possess as human beings. For instance, the right to liberty is grounded in our claim that we are rational beings, and that no such being should be owned or coerced by another. Similarly, the right to free speech is premised on the idea that rational beings must be allowed to

express their thoughts without the coercion of another. If property rights are morally grounded (and they need not be), they are based on the idea that I own something if my labour has produced it. Of course, it is much more complex than that within a capitalist framework: the chain of property rights tends to begin and end with those who control capital rather than those who actually produce with their own hands. However it is conceived, a moral theory of property rights includes the idea that there should be proper husbanding of the property and that it should not be despoiled: future generations must have access to it. This latter consideration is important when considering the moral implications of colorisation.

Directors and creative people claim rights on the basis of their creative labour. In fact, we enter into the realms of the metaphorical when we deal with this question. Directors are not simply claiming that they are *metteurs en scène*, the mere organisers of actors, script, scenery and camera position, they are claiming that their creativity passes over into the film. By unifying the various elements which make up an audiovisual product (and which are actually performed by a multiplicity of professions, crafts and skills), they unify the creative product. The final cut is in some way 'theirs'. Therefore, they are not only the guardians of the final cut: they and they alone have the final say as to the future use of that cut.

This auteurist argument runs into two problems. First, audiovisual production is a collective enterprise; in particular, those who write and adapt screenplays have paternity rights over the film. Indeed, many scriptwriters who have seen their treatments ripped to shreds by directors might think it rather precious of those who do this then to claim privileged treatment for their final cut. Surely author's rights should apply to those who are easily recognisable as writers, namely those who put pen to paper or finger to word processor?

Second, those who create the conditions for the production of an audiovisual work have economic and moral rights to the exploitation of that product. The question is, do they have author's rights? The answer could be, yes. After all, a Ford car worker does not claim property rights over a car lamp which he has just assembled. Within a broadly capitalist framework, the property belongs to those who buy the workers' labour, provide the parts and sell the end product. Similarly, as TV companies provide the production costs, technical facilities, actors, scripts and sell the product, can the director claim any rights? Indeed, with soaps such as *Coronation Street*, or drama series such as *Minder*, the production company often sets the framework for the characters and the action. If

the director merely assembles these components, how does he or she differ from a worker on a production line?

Clearly the question of authorship of audiovisual work is moot. Furthermore, the issue of rights always brings out competition and conflict among those challenging for them. The problem with rights is that they are part of a zero-sum game: in other words, if I have x amount I am depriving someone else of an equal amount—there is only so much to go round. Rights, because they are founded on individual property, end up with an unequal distribution of such property. Recent debates in the pages of *Writer's Newsletter*, *Director* and *Broadcast* demonstrate that the directors' claim to authorship (and the rights thereof) is raising many hackles among ancillary professions. Writers fear that directors are attempting to usurp their position by legal chicanery, whereas the directors are adamant that although they dislike the French term—*auteur*—which the bill uses to describe them, they are the ultimate guardians of the film.

The truth is that the directors' position is auteurism run riot or, more precisely, used tactically to try to gain some leverage on those using their material. Just as a commonsense attitude to auteur theory suggests that some powerful directors with a strong and unified theme can be considered the prime movers of an audiovisual work, so we can say that some directors should have author's rights. Herein lies the problem. Do we need a tribunal to decide who is or is not an author? Perhaps this absurdity demonstrates the problems of accrediting an audiovisual work to oneself as private property and indicates why the Government finds it easy to preserve the myth of author's rights without investing the concept with much reality.

There are two ways in which this impasse might be resolved. Writers, directors and line producers (as opposed to production companies) may agree to some common definition of their creative input and argue for a collective inalienable right as the creators of the audiovisual work. Or, more realistically, we can shift the focus of the debate to the consumer, who has a fairly unproblematic right to an accurate description of the product purchased. If someone sells me a bottle purporting to be Chanel No. 5 which contains a cheap and nasty perfume, I can take him to court. Similarly, it is not inconceivable that legislation could be put in place which would protect consumers from believing that they had seen a film which in fact had been re-edited for television. The right to view, rather than the rights of the author, may be the most fruitful way to protect final cuts. Either way, in the words of Winston Churchill, 'Something must be done.'

TAKE SIX SOVIETS

Take six Russians. Or rather six Soviets: three Russians, an Uzbek, an Estonian and a Georgian. Set them down in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. Place them with the best available fellow professionals from British television. Shake, stir and mix, and what do you get? An interesting, innovative and far from insipid cocktail, it was hoped, and so it proved—both in the making and in the tasting.

This was Take Three of an Anglo-Soviet exchange that began in 1984 with the week-long season of Soviet Television held at the National Film Theatre. This first sustained look at Soviet television by public audiences in the UK (and possibly in the West) predated *glasnost*, though even then a free hand was given in the selection of programmes. The material was variable in quality but always compelling by

virtue of its rarity and the fascinating glimpses it offered behind the socio-cultural curtain of life in the USSR.

Take Two was the British Television event held in 1986 in Moscow and Tashkent, sponsored by the Great Britain-USSR Association and backed by the BBC, the ITV companies and Channel 4. Here Peter Fiddick, Media Editor of the *Guardian*, was invited to make a personal selection of the best of British television in the 1980s to be shown to a mixed professional and public audience at Dom Kino in Moscow, the home of the Union of Cinematographers, embracing, BAFTA-like, workers in both the cinema and television industries. It was the largest-ever public showing of British television to be held abroad, and the facilities were lavish. Multiple screenings were held in 35mm, 16mm and video theatres, and stimulating, if mostly formal, discussions took place between the Soviet audiences and a

British delegation that included Paul Fox, Richard Eyre, Gavin Millar, Leslie Woodhead and Phil Redmond.

It was immediately apparent from these contacts that, *inter alia*, creative people working in Soviet television were, for the most part, completely ignorant of the workings of British television, which they tended to confuse, or at least blanket, with American television. It was also clear that under the leadership of Elem Klimov there was a fresh desire within the Union to improve working relationships with British television. And so Take Three was conceived: a delegation of creative workers (producers, directors, writers) would be invited to experience an inside view of British television, meet their British counterparts, and discuss joint projects for the future. Finally, in April this year, the cameras rolled, the focus this time on people rather than programmes.

In Liverpool: Gani Rasulev (group, 3rd from left), Yuri Belyankin (5th from left).



Yuri Belyankin, documentary film producer-cameraman, leader of the delegation, set the tone for the event during his introductory speech at BAFTA. 'Not one of us is a bureaucrat,' he declared proudly, 'not one of us is from the *nomenklatura* (the ruling Communist Party elite) . . . we are all creative people. A few years ago it would have been different, quite different.' This was truly a post-*glasnost* occasion.

Belyankin himself specialises in making films about Russian history, art and culture, with profiles of Tolstoy, Shostakovich, the poets Mayakovsky and Blok and the painter Rerikh to his credit. His current preoccupation is to make a frank film biography, perhaps with western help, of the composer Prokofiev.

New Soviet TV:

Painter Lyuba Maikova in the documentary *A View from the Window*; (below) *The Cold Summer of 1953*.



One of the most moving and historically telling moments of the BAFTA evening screening was an extract from his film *Georgi Sviridov* (Moscow, Ekran, 1988). The film is based on the reflections of Sviridov (described as 'the leading Russian and Soviet composer') upon Russian national culture, and the 'difficult fate of the artist in Russia'—an understated though scarcely veiled reference to the artist who has traditionally been at once revered and persecuted in both Soviet and pre-Soviet history. The extract shown included stunning archive footage (seen for the first time in the West) depicting the wholesale destruction of priceless Russian churches and monasteries following the Revolution. Sviridov's interview intoned: ' . . . we have destroyed much that is of value, much that is irreplaceable.' The music track brought a lump to the throat. The archive film, we learned, had lain under Belyankin's bed for twelve or more years.

The original intention behind the BAFTA screening had been to invite Gosteleradio (the Soviet State Broadcasting Organisation) to make a one-hour montage of current TV programming. This proved impossible when top representatives from Gosteleradio withdrew owing to pressure in preparing for the Gorbachev-Reagan Moscow summit. We were denied, therefore, the chance to see something of the many *succès de scandale* currently transforming into TV addicts disaffected Soviet youth and cynical intelligentsia alike (not to mention hardbitten western correspondents): programmes such as *Uzglyad* ('a licence to shock'**), *To Midnight and After* (the first late-night chat show on Soviet TV), *Twelfth Story*

(the critical phone-in programme which puts ministers and bureaucrats on the spot), *To 16 and Older* (the controversial youth programme), *Searchlight on Perestroika* (investigative-reporting show exposing corruption and incompetence). Missing too were examples of the revamped *Vremya* (Nine O'Clock News) and the kind of heterogeneous repackaging of programming perceptively described by William Fisher in the Spring issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*.

What we were offered instead was a very feature-oriented selection of films made not by the internal programme departments of Gosteleradio, but commissioned by Gosteleradio from major studios such as Mosfilm, Lenfilm, Georgian Telefilm; from more outlying regional and Republican studios such as Kamchatka Television, Uzbektelefilm, Estonian Tallintelefilm, Armentelefilm; and from the separate features unit (documentary and fiction) Ekran, one of the most prolific producers of films in the Soviet Union. Each member of the delegation sent or brought one of his own films, and there were additional films for us to select from, about four hours' worth in all. Whittling all this down to just under an hour (the BAFTA slot) proved no easy task. The selection of extracts is a frustrating business at the best of times—even more tricky when you know the producer or director will be present at the screening. However, our initial disappointment was soon overcome when it became clear that the films contained material which, in a variety of ways, reflected both *glasnost* and *perestroika*—with a touch of *demokratizatsiya* thrown in for good measure.

Tynis Kask, for instance, documentary and feature film-maker, Editor-in-Chief of Tallintelefilm and one of the founders of Estonian television, brought with him a striking documentary on the handicapped, *Dance in the Wheelchair* (Estonia, Tallintelefilm, 1986). Until very recently, the Soviet authorities have preferred to pretend there simply aren't any handicapped people in the Soviet Union (as if physical handicap were an admission of social failure). They certainly didn't feature on television. Estonia was the first of the Soviet republics to screen a regular series about the handicapped, and this film for the first time gave them a voice, allowing them to describe their sense of isolation from society. The series as a whole is being used to highlight the need for greater recognition of their problems, and has been networked on national all-union television to great effect—though, says Kask, there's still a long way to go. A prime example of educational television being used to shift social attitudes.

An equally remarkable documentary, for which there was no time in the screening (its effectiveness would have been lost in a short extract), was *A Person Can Do Anything* (Moscow,

**See 'Seeing Red' by Martin Walker, *The Listener*, 7 April 1988.

Ekrana, 1986), directed by Alexander Shuvikov. The film shows a gifted Moscow doctor, Lyudmila Nekrasova, at work curing people 'on camera' of severely disabling stuttering, a process both humorous and moving in itself and one which made riveting television.

Humour is a hallmark of Georgian television and cinema, and the Georgian delegate, documentary and feature director Georgi Levashov-Tumanishvili, bore ample witness to this trait, both in his person and in his work. At BAFTA an excerpt from *Moon Globe* (Georgian Telefilm, 1987), recent winner of the Bronze Nymph at Monte Carlo, showed what might happen if Fellini were let loose with a documentary crew and lots of roubles. Tumanishvili invited, through announcements on radio and television, a group of 'ordinary' Georgian people (in itself a contradiction in terms) to gather in the huge cellar of a house in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital. He then asked them to talk about their dreams—or re-enact them in music, song, dance, mime (even whistling, if that's what they felt like) and ponder on why and how the reality of their life did or didn't quite fit the dream. The result is a picaresque 'happening' in front of camera, exploring the potential for good in all of us (the ordinary Georgian lives are counterpointed with scenes from Live Aid with Geldof, Fonda, et al, just 'happening' to come through on satellite in a darkened corner of the cellar). The

Gani Rasulev, translator Helena Bayliss, Alexander Proshkin; (below) Georgi Levashov-Tumanishvili. Photos: John Roberts.



film notes with characteristic irony, however, that the only place you are free really to express yourself fully is in a basement cellar. In the discussion that followed the screening, it transpired that Tumanishvili had not had to submit a script to obtain backing or funding for this unorthodox, subversive film, in the making of which he had a completely free hand.

Georgian television and cinema have traditionally enjoyed a Latin liberalism not always to be found in Moscow. All the more remarkable, therefore, was the film offered by director Alexander Proshkin, *The Cold Summer of 1953* (Mosfilm, 1987), dealing frankly as it does with the period of violence in the Soviet Union which immediately followed the death of Stalin. Beria, then head of the KGB, gave a special amnesty to criminals, who subsequently terrorised the country, bringing robbery, murder and rape to the Russian countryside, a policy calculated by Beria to preserve terror in another form.

Proshkin's film tells the story of a band of these ex-criminals who begin to prey on a local fishing community in a remote village in Northern Russia. The villagers are defended by two political prisoners serving out their exile there. For these two prisoners this struggle is a way of rediscovering their own human identity—in one scene they even use their own names again, a practice forbidden or forgotten in the anonymity of exile. The film, which stars the popular actor Anatoli Papanov (who died shortly after the end of filming), recently caused a sensation with Soviet television viewers, who found themselves confronted with yet another slice of their history which had previously been concealed from them. Proshkin is at present planning a 6-part series on the life and fate (i.e. death in a Stalin prison) of the great geneticist Vavilov (whose rehabilitation is a major test of *glasnost*), for which co-production support in the West is being sought.

Proshkin it was who, during the post-screening discussion at BAFTA, made an eloquent and moving case for the duty of Soviet television and cinema to re-

tore to the people their own history. The whole truth now had to be told. There was no going back. Frequent references were made to the period of *zastoi* (stagnation), i.e. the Brezhnev era, characterised by cinema and television critic Yuri Bogomolov as a kind of 'peaceful Stalinism'. 'If Gorbachev had not existed we would have had to invent him.' 'We are engaged in an irreversible process.' One by one the delegates hammered home the same message. What if it doesn't work? 'We do not dare even to ask the question—the important thing is to go on making films that tell the truth'—Tynis Kask from Estonia. All this was courageous, telling stuff, hitherto unthinkable public statements from an official Soviet delegation abroad. One member of the BAFTA audience remained unimpressed. Why such unanimity? Why couldn't they disagree like good British directors? The reply was swift and uncompromising: would you really disagree over totalitarianism, mass execution, liquidation, Stalinism?

Stalin's favourite actor, so we learned during one of the four seminars held at BAFTA, was James Cagney. So much so that he ordered up special subtitled versions of Cagney's films for his own private viewing. If Stalin hated dubbing, one's tempted to think he can't have been all bad—though one is left speculating uneasily on the motives behind the large appetite for small gangsters in the original version. The seminars (a general introduction to British television by Peter Fiddick, followed by sessions on drama, documentary, arts programmes and co-productions, featuring leading British creative figures such as Roger Graef, Alan Plater, Betty Willingale, Julia Smith, Graeme McDonald, Barrie Gavin) were something of a revelation, too, to the Soviet delegation.

Predictably, perhaps, it was the sheer diversity of British television culture (structures, number of channels, sources of programme making, means of distribution, variety of quality) which most impressed them, conditioned as they are to a massively centralised system. The resultant choice for the viewer was a good thing, they said, though they were alive too to the dangers of a market free-for-all, and an apparent pluralism disguising the potential for control by a few less than benign entrepreneurs. They were sensitive also to the spread by television and satellite of American 'cultural imperialism', and were in no doubts as to where their own cultural loyalties lay: 'We have to reconcile ourselves with Europe,' said one.

Not all their discussions had been easy. On occasion they had been put to the test by aggressive questioning on their knowledge, for example, of European cinema. 'They seemed determined to prove our ignorance,' said Gani Rasulev, the gentle, easy-going writer and head of Uzbektelefilm. 'But we just named films, directors, subjects, stars, and it was ok. In any case I always feel a bit superior in such discussions. I just ask them how much they know about Uzbektelefilm.'

The problem of the individual was common to both cultures, said film and television critic Yuri Bogomolov. During the period of stagnation, he recalled, in a particularly vivid phrase, 'we suffered the collectivisation of the consciousness' in the same way that agriculture had been collectivised under Stalin. But British television also had its censorship problems, he remarked. At the moment Soviet television was going through an unprecedented period almost of anti-censorship, explained Gani Rasulev. 'It's a time when everything can go through the system,' he said. 'The Soviet viewer is now incredibly curious to know what's going on. And television has to give the answers.' One BAFTA questioner noted the irony of the apparent contrast between the new-found freedoms in the Soviet Union and recent events and trends in British television.

What then were the highlights of the visit? For Rasulev it was a trip to The Cavern in Liverpool. Georgi Tumanishvili, the Georgian, was hard put to choose between his ride in Hyde Park on a Sunday morning (Georgians are fanatical horsemen), and his meeting with David Rose of Channel 4 to discuss a film project based on the story of Rosinante, the horse of Don Quixote. Tynis Kask, the Estonian, was thrilled at the opportunity of discussing

socially committed television with Paul Bonner, now of ITVA, and to have screenings of programmes for the handicapped and hard of hearing arranged by the BBC's Continuing Education Department. Yuri Bogomolov, of the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Artistic Knowledge, had the chance to discuss joint research projects with the BFI, and was impressed too by the number of woman producers in British television as compared with Soviet TV. Indeed women were conspicuously absent from their delegation. Yuri Belyankin was struck in equal measure by the preservation of architecture in Central London ('the most beautiful western city I've seen') and by the sheer openness of their meetings with British television people. Openness is, of course, one translation of *glasnost*, and it was this quality which most characterised the Soviet delegation, too. Proshkin had pushed forward his Vavilov project, though nothing was finalised, and seemed to enjoy every minute of what was for him and the whole delegation their first visit to the UK.

Joint projects had been discussed. They may or may not materialise. Though the prospects looked good: in future western producers and companies will be able to negotiate and clinch deals with individual studios in the USSR, new companies such as Videofilm and Tele-export (due to be set up in place of international relations

departments following the June party plenum), and even with individual Soviet producers. ('Our problem at the moment is that we don't have any producers in the true western sense of the word!') A whole new world of opportunity, then. But the most important thing was that human contact had been made between professionals. It was just the beginning.

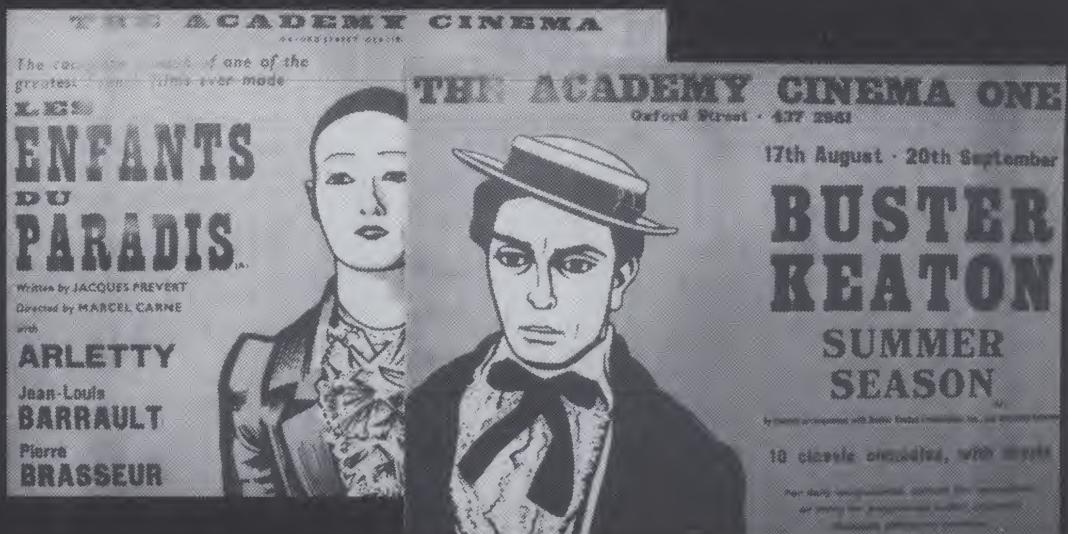
Take Four of the Anglo-Soviet television exchange will be the Edinburgh Television Festival in August, where it is hoped both to give a more comprehensive view of Soviet television, and to have more in-depth discussions on the nature of *glasnost* in television and its implications for Soviet society and for British programme-makers wishing to work there. Take Five, it is planned, will be the British Week in Kiev in 1990, the Great Britain-USSR Association sponsored event, where a significant participation by British television is expected. Meanwhile, the script is not yet written, the financial package not yet in place, but the dialogue has well and truly begun. ■

Terry Doyle, Senior Producer, BBC Television Continuing Education Department, was co-organiser of the Soviet Television Visit, together with Peter Fidick of the 'Guardian' and Elizabeth Roberts of the Great Britain-USSR Association. The event received the generous support of the BBC, the RRV companies, Channel 4 and BAFTA.

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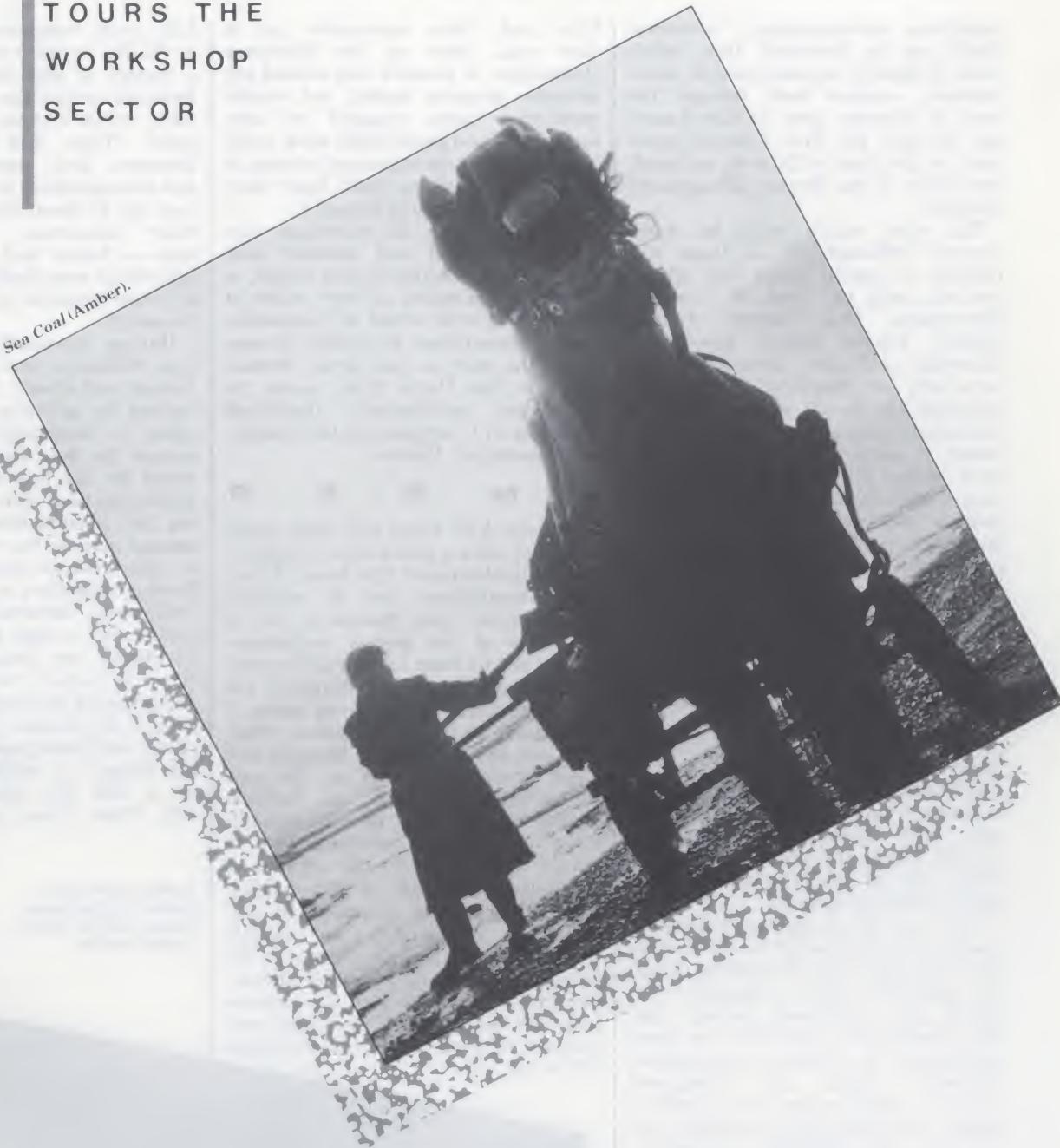


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WORKSHOPS

THERESA FITZGERALD
TOURS THE
WORKSHOP
SECTOR

Sea Coal (Amber).



At a recent film and video festival in the United States, a leading British independent film-maker (speaking privately, hence it wouldn't be fair to name him) summarily dismissed the British workshop sector's contribution as 'bad work promoted as art'. Nor is this an isolated viewpoint; a good many mainstream film-makers would go along with him. Even those broadly sympathetic to the sector's aims and politics often accuse it of amateurism and self-indulgence, of retreating within a cloistered and cosseted world—and not everyone within the sector itself, come to that, would entirely disagree. All the same, it could be argued that such views betray a basic misconception of the workshop sector's role and purpose.

Conceived in the cultural and political ferment that marked the tail-end of the 1960s, the 'grant-aided independent sector' (as it's officially termed) repre-

sents a fairly uneasy alliance of markedly disparate individuals and groups. Besides an unknown number of video artists and experimental filmmakers, there are some 200 active workshops, ranging from tiny community-access projects through various special-interest groups to fullblown production companies. The common factor that links them is financial support from public bodies. These funding bodies in turn make up a strikingly motley collection: local and regional authorities; arts councils; institutions like the British Film Institute and the Gulbenkian Foundation; plus, in recent years, Channel 4 and the European Social Fund.

Not, of course, that uniformity—of outlook, internal organisation, creative philosophy, or even funding source—ever formed part of anyone's intention when the sector was first mooted. On

the contrary; the greater the diversity of practice (so long as it was broadly oppositional to the mainstream), the better. Freed, so the theory went, from the grosser constraints of commercialism, the workshops could provide an environment in which variety, non-conformity and spikily unconventional visions could flourish. If it's true that, over the years, a style of film-making has developed which can be generally characterised as 'workshop'—and which can justly be lumped together as in the pejorative comment quoted in my first sentence—this could be held to indicate how far the sector has fallen short of what was hoped of it. I'd like to explore, by focusing on three widely differing organisations within the sector, whether any such inference holds water.

For a start, it can certainly be objected that at least two distinct, though

sometimes complementary, 'workshop' styles can be discerned. One, which could be broadly characterised as 'documentary', reaches back through the work of directors such as Ken Loach, and through the Free Cinema movement, to the ideas of Grierson as founding father of the British documentary tradition.

The other, which might be styled 'artistic'—although not all those who practise it would accept the label—connects with the work of European film-makers like Godard, Straub/Huillet, Yvonne Rainer, Fassbinder, Akerman—and with theories (not always fully integrated) of deconstructed narrative and Brecht-derived notions of alienation. Uniting these two strands—which, it should be said, can well co-exist within the same workshop, and even within the same film—is a shared political element arising from various grass-roots concerns with issues of representation, image and ways of working.

These latter concerns, deriving from the perception that many voices and viewpoints are largely absent from the mainstream media, provided the impetus for the formation of what is undoubtedly the sector's best-known group—the Franchised Workshops. With the setting up of Channel 4 specifically to cater for such interests—including a remit to encourage 'innovation and experiment'—space was created within the media to offer the sector not only larger audiences, but greater financial stability.

The very act of offering that space, though, set up potential conflicts, since the workshops' ways of working (which are integral to their philosophy) fell outside any recognised industry pattern. Particularly alarming was their commitment to collective organisation, non-profit status and 'integrated practice'—which means involvement in related activities such as training, distribution and exhibition, as well as encouraging individuals to change roles from one production to the next. Also, many of the workshops' members came from outside the media. You didn't need to be hostile to the sector's ideas to recognise that such practices run wholly counter to mainstream methods and agreements.

Further, many film-makers among the newly emergent commercial independent sector—also until recently largely reliant on Channel 4—were suspicious that the sector would be used as a source of cheap programming, undercutting the independents' already skin-tight operations. The very fact that many of them shared quite a lot of the workshops' political and aesthetic ideals only exacerbated such fears.

To calm them, and at the same time to safeguard the sector's principles, the ACTT, along with the BFI, Channel 4, the Regional Arts Associations, and the sector's own coalition, the Independent

Film and Video Association (as it then was), drew up the Workshop Declaration. A formula was worked out whereby 'properly funded and staffed production units engaged in non-commercial and grant-aided work' could be approved by the union and, subject to stringent conditions, could have their productions shown on Channel 4.

Obviously, with 22 workshops currently franchised and another half-dozen or so waiting in the wings, a detailed examination of every aspect of the sector's work would be impossible. I've therefore chosen to consider in some detail the work of just three—Amber, based in the North East; WITCH, an all-women, provisionally franchised workshop in Liverpool; and the London-based workshop, Retake.

A M B E R

'I bet you don't know any other workshop that owns a pub, a boat, a chapel—and 17 tambourines.' For Amber Films, such acquisitions—not to mention proliferations—have become a way of life. One of the pioneer workshops, Amber set up shop in Newcastle-upon-Tyne twenty years ago, drawn to the region as much by its strong sense of community as by its distinctive industrial and scenic character. Starting as a small group who'd met as film and photography students in London, Amber brought with them a commitment to collective working and to power-sharing. They also shared a neo-Griersonian view of film-making, based on a concern to record, as aesthetically as possible, the rapidly changing working-class culture of the locality. And, in line with their philosophy that they should 'own the industry in which they worked', their long-term goal was to create a viable media industry for the area.

Like most independent film-makers in the 70s, Amber's members worked at a variety of jobs—teaching, acting as freelance technicians, whatever came to hand—while making films as best they could. (Their first film cost £400.) However, their entrepreneurial spirit and determination to be self-supporting soon led to them setting up the first of their 'businesses', Lambton Visual Aids—a frame- and slide-making concern which soon developed into a library of visual material which now services the world.

Having eventually secured grants from Northern Arts, the BFI, the Arts Council and others, Amber was able to expand its activities. Purchasing premises in Newcastle's Quayside, they opened the Side Gallery and Cinema, which for the first time gave them a production base. Ever open to maximising their opportunities, they rented out unused space in the warehouse complex to other groups—including a bookshop. Further subsidiary or semi-autonomous enterprises followed, so that today Amber, like a duck amid her flotilla of ducklings, can boast touring exhibitions, an archive, a publishing, poster and postcard business, duplication facilities, a distribution network, an actors' studio and photography co-op (set up in the chapel), a working pub doubling as a film set, and, in conjunction with Trade Films—another franchised

Amber productions:
(below) T. Dan Smith,
(centre) Shields Stories,
(right) The Box.



workshop—their own equipment outlet, Broadcast Facility North.

All of which may sound like the perfect recipe for workers' capitalism. But Amber is firmly committed to its non-profit status and to serving the community—in particular the working-class community—in which it lives. As Amber's Pat McCarthy explains: 'It's a grassroots involvement in saying "the media should belong to you, you should influence it." Basically, what we're saying to people is that it's an area you should be involved in. It's not something that should be done *at* you. Don't just sit back and moan about what the media hit you with—get in there, learn the skills. Get in there and start saying things for yourself. Each of the workshops, in its own small way, has tried to do that with people. It'll be a slow process. You need to have more groups in existence, you need more people doing that.'

One way Amber proposed to tackle the problem was by getting together with other groups in the region—Trade Films, Swingbridge Video, A19 and Siren—to set up the North East Media Development Council. Its first task was to look at the question of training.

'There was a recognition that we did need to train people. It was tried internally. With practice we realised that to be a production company, and to produce at the level we need to produce at, we didn't have time to train people. We weren't giving them a very good service. So the organic process was—if we can't do it *this* way, what *can* we do? It was all part of the debate about how do you make an industry grow?'

The result was the establishment of the North East Media Training Centre, a £2m purpose-built unit which runs a two-year full-time training course, plus various other training initiatives. Training on its own, though, is hardly enough; so the NEMDC's next task was to answer the question often levelled at workshops—training for what? The answer was to form 'start-up' units for the trainees on graduating, offering them a two-year leg-up to develop their own businesses. One thing led logically enough to another, and the Council is now also involved in setting up subtitling and duplication facilities, a distribution network, Primo, along with various other activities.

With so much energy devoted to establishing a media industry and securing funding for it—Amber are also involved in the European Media Programme, and in trying to persuade the European Regional Fund that it should have a media policy—you might think there'd be little time left for production. On the contrary; with a catalogue of more than thirty films, including documentaries, animation, and three features, Amber is one of the most productive workshops. Currently working on their fourth feature—about a woman's ambition to get her seaman's ticket (that's where the fishing boat comes in)—Amber are also in the process of producing a series of short 'current affairs' dramas, *Shields Stories*, dealing with local issues within a 'soap' format; making an animation short, *The Box*; and working on the final stages of a documentary co-production with East Germany.

'I think television influenced our work,' says Pat McCarthy, 'especially the move into fiction—and the ambition for audiences. There's no doubt that Channel 4's money has made a great deal of difference, and there's no doubt that as more money becomes available your ambitions grow. But the terms on which we get the finance are crucial to us. We were in negotiation with the Channel's series commissioning editor for a time, but the problem with that was how the money was to be raised. We wanted it under the terms of the Declaration. They wanted it as a conventional commission, which would mean working in a conventional way, and that wasn't acceptable to us. It would destroy our process.'

'One thing our films have in common is that you're always in a real environment, you always have real people in the background—we never use extras, we never use sets in the conventional way of building something. There's always a documentary element—in the latest one the crew are real fishermen—and the actors have to be integrated with that, become part of that community. We believe that the more intrinsic the work is the more interesting it is to people. That's not just nationally but locally.'

'With the series *Who's Next for Privatisation?*, which was part of a trade union awareness campaign, we emphasised how important it was for people to make their own tapes about their own situation. The impact of the tapes—they've been seen by over 11,000 people at meetings set up by local shop stewards and so on—lies in the fact that the videos reflect local structures. People recognise the place, they recognise the people, they know it's *their* job being talked about. For us that was the most important element of the videos.'

One problem in assessing the workshop sector generally has always been: on just what criteria should its achievements be measured? With twenty years' activity behind them, a strong local presence manifested in the widespread distribution of their work—not just the expected local authorities, libraries, and the like, but also pubs and soon, they hope, the Metro—and a number of international prizes to their credit, Amber is clearly enough a success on its own terms. Whether on more conventional and particularly aesthetic grounds their productions pass muster is less easy to determine.

Experimentation, by its very nature, takes time to jell, and finding 'political' forms of film language is especially tricky. It can be argued that local work created specifically by, with and for a particular constituency should be judged solely by how that community reacts. Work destined for the wider national audiences of cinema and television, however, must endure a different spotlight. In their feature films, Amber have tried to evolve a style blending



documentary realism with fictional elements; the result has been hybrids which qualify neither as drama-documentary nor as fictional realism. On the occasions when they've plumped uncompromisingly for one or the other, the approach seems to come together far more satisfactorily. The ten mini-dramas, *Shields Stories*, which fall wholly into the fictional-realism category, are, to me at least, the most enjoyable as well as the most informative work that Amber has yet produced.

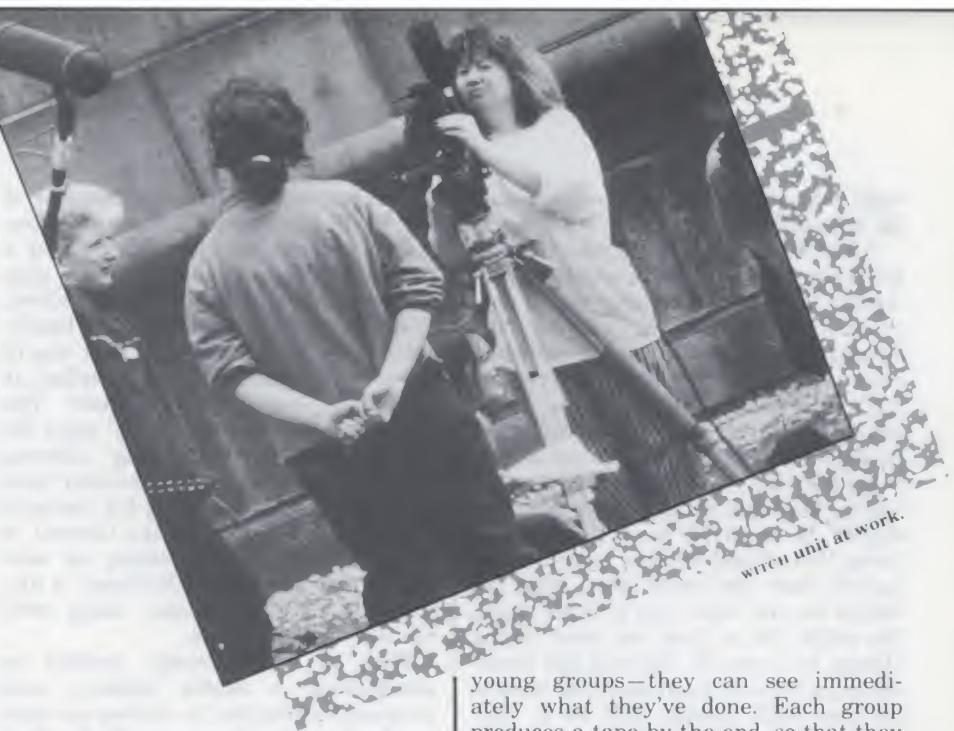
For their first feature, *Seacoal*, Amber went to live among the travellers who scratch a living shoaling waste coal washed ashore from the Lyne-mouth power station on the Northumbrian coast. A fictional story played by actors was evolved, around which the local community 'played' themselves. Quite apart from the fact that their contributions were unscripted (to satisfy Equity's requirements), which lent a certain spontaneity to the proceedings, these genuine 'characters' tended to overwhelm the injected fictional element. The result was that at many points the concocted story got in the way, arousing a strong desire for the real people to be left alone to tell their own story.

In Amber's latest feature to be released, *T. Dan Smith*, an even more complex interweaving of fact and fiction was employed to tell the story of the Newcastle city boss jailed in 1971 for his part in the Poulson Affair. Once again the fictional elements unbalanced the tenor of the film, prompting an uneasiness about the status of the 'real' people on screen—who included Smith himself. Were they recounting their version of events, or should we see them as also party to the fictional manipulation of the rest of the story?

Although such experiments are obviously valuable, it's hard to resist a feeling that they stem more from a desire to conduct formal exercises in film-making than from a genuine desire to evolve compelling forms for 'political' storytelling. There have, after all, been a number of politically motivated films—the black American Bill Duke's *The Killing Floor* and the Argentinian Luis Puenzo's *The Official Version* spring to mind—which, while not disdaining the conventions of narrative cinema, have still put across their political points with force and cogency, eschewing over-simplification for the story's sake, and engaging their audiences' minds along with their emotions.

W · I · T · C · H

Such questions are germane to the sector's philosophy. If it's felt, after all, that the mainstream is failing to present certain viewpoints adequately, how should they be represented without being distorted or simplified in the name of 'entertainment'? As we'll see later, the all-Asian group, Retake, have chosen a route which differs consider-



witch unit at work.

ably not only from Amber's but from many of their fellow black workshops. First, though, and by way of contrast, I want to look at WITCH, a small women's workshop currently provisionally franchised.

Although the workshop sector is heavily committed to equal opportunities, and has been greatly influenced by feminism, it none the less mirrors the mainstream in being largely male dominated. Of the 22 franchised workshops, only four are run exclusively by women. (There are, however, several more currently waiting to be blessed.) Of these, WITCH—the Women's Independent Cinema House—in Liverpool isn't untypical.

Having obtained a grant from Merseyside County Council, WITCH opened its doors some five years ago as a voluntarily run screening resource to show films by and for women. In response to local demand, it then began organising women-only workshops in film, video, animation and photography, using the premises and equipment of the area's franchised workshop, Open-Eye. By a logical progression, WITCH also began to attract commissions—in particular for work dealing with issues of women and health.

By 1984, they had found sufficient funding to employ five permanent workers (two on job-share), and could begin thinking about expanding their activities still further. In common with the majority of workshops, WITCH is organised collectively but individuals tend to be responsible for specific areas, passing on their skills to each other as well as to the community.

As in most community-based workshops, training forms a major part of WITCH's work and their courses are highly popular, attracting a wide range of people. Pip Nicholls: 'As far as I know, we're the only people running women-only workshops in the area. We do a lot of video. Partly because it's cheaper but also it's easier to work with, especially with beginners and

young groups—they can see immediately what they've done. Each group produces a tape by the end, so that they can get the full experience of working on a project. One group at the moment is making a video about falling in love.'

'We'd like to be able to run more advanced workshops that we can at present. Most of what we do is very basic. We've started a photo club, and another for animation, to give some kind of continuity for people who've been on our courses, but we don't have the space or funding to do much more. We'd also like more training for ourselves. We're all fully paid-up members of ACTT, but like most women have had to get our training where we could find it. Aine Whitehead who runs our animation section became involved in it while studying fine art at Brighton, but for the rest of us it's been rather ad hoc.'

Early on, it became apparent that black women on Merseyside were not being adequately serviced by the workshop and it was decided to set up a separate Black Women's Section to cater for their needs. One of the group's co-ordinators, Barbara Phillips, takes up the story. 'Basically, it was a cultural difference. You often find that white women film-makers come from a feminist viewpoint, whereas black women often want to talk about racism. Another difficulty we had is that many black women thought that feminism is lesbianism and they didn't want to know. At the beginning WITCH had a very strong lesbian-feminist identity, though that's not the case now, and that made it hard to attract black women to the workshops. So we decided the way round the problem was to have a separate section.'

'We've also been able to tap additional funding from people like Jane Moores at the John Moores Foundation, and from Gulbenkian, which has meant we've been able to produce our own videos and mount an exhibition of black women's photography. We've also done screenings of black films. But it's not all separate—we still work on other WITCH projects.'

In contrast to the ambitions—some would say the pretensions—of many

workshops, WITCH's productions are modest and refreshingly free of gimmickry. They're also community video at its best. In each case there's a sense of concern and involvement with the subject which gives the work a verve and immediacy often lacking in more self-consciously anti-mainstream workshop productions. Here there's a genuine feeling that, whatever the crudities of production, usually unheard voices are getting their say.

Even technical problems are turned to advantage. At the end of *Ella*, which documents a local black drama workshop's production of the Cinderella story, there's a disarming series of outtakes—all neatly emphasising that mistakes are part of the process. In another of the black section's tapes, *They Don't Get a Chance: A Tribute to Black Women*, an interviewer bursts out laughing at one participant's reply to her questioning—not only a refreshingly open response, but incidentally calling into question the restricted conventions of most TV interviews. The video is also a heartfelt testament to black 'heroines' unjustly neglected by society at large. *The Capenhurst Connection* intersperses live action with an intelligent and witty use of animation to explain the complex links between illegal uranium mining in Namibia and its processing at BNFL plants on Merseyside. Other work celebrates local musicians, women and sport, and takes in issues from work to health which affect women's lives.

The work of WITCH has become widely seen—distribution follows the usual pattern of libraries, youth clubs, women's groups, schools and other educational outlets, plus specifically local venues such as the nearby American bases. (It's also obtainable nationally through the sector's networks such as

Circles, Cinema of Women and Concord Films Council.) Even so, the pull of Channel 4 and more stable funding is proving irresistible—hence the application for franchised status.

However, though franchised status offers the allure of wider audiences and financial stability, it can also exact a price—as groups like WITCH have discovered in the past, finding themselves under pressure to over-extend their activities in order to match up to criteria based on the vision of large workshops like Amber. Such factors may well account for the disappointing work of many in the sector; in uprooting their local grassroots aspirations and pitching into the race for national exposure, workshops often risk losing the very freshness and immediacy that gained them their original constituency. But since Channel 4 has become the seal of approval for the sector, and also affects the way other bodies make funding decisions, such a move has become almost mandatory. As Barbara Phillips sees it:

'It's the next step. We've a number of ideas and scripts we'd like to do, but if we're to survive we need more security and that means Channel 4. At the moment we're provisionally franchised and have a commission in development with Caroline Spry at the Channel. It's about the situation for women in Ireland who have to come over here for abortions. But it's important to get something on Channel 4, to get a foot in the door and open the way to getting more women into TV and film. Women in the North, women everywhere, don't get enough say.'

In the meantime, at least one of WITCH's problems—space—should be eased when the group moves out of

their present cramped quarters at Open-Eye into a building being refurbished by the Community Arts Trust with funding from a wide range of sources. Here again, a move towards the highly successful conglomerate pattern established by Amber seems to be in the offing, since the building, which fronts a busy shopping street, will also provide accommodation for other groups including CAT itself, Open-Eye, and another local workshop, Community Productions Merseyside.

R E T A K E

Although there's as yet nothing else on the scale of the North East's enterprises, similar clubbing together of resources to maximise opportunities is a pattern emerging across the country—notably in Birmingham, and in the Sheffield area. Such moves, though, highlight a basic problem for the workshops, and one which has yet to be fully addressed—namely, funding.

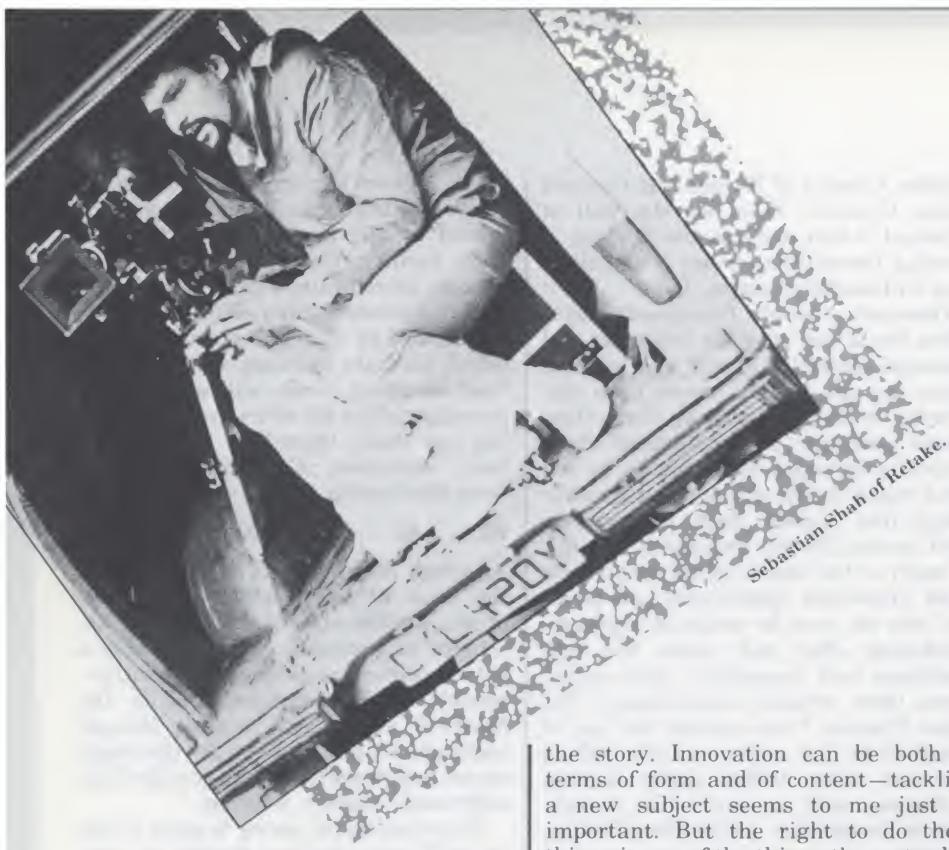
Encouraging the sector to grow is fine in itself, but such ideas assume an ever-expanding source of public monies. In the present economic and political climate—and quite possibly in any other—such resources are largely static or even shrinking. Given their commitment to non-profit distribution, and the obligation under the Declaration to keep the copyright in their work (which makes it less attractive to potential commercial sponsors), workshops are limited in the ways they can support themselves. Nor can Channel 4 be relied on to continue funding existing workshops indefinitely, as Retake discovered this March.

One of the first black workshops to be established in the surge which followed the GLC's enlightened policies in the early 80s, and almost unique in being all-Asian, Retake is otherwise fairly typical of many in the sector. Operating from modest premises in Camden Town—they too plan to take up more suitable accommodation in the near future—Retake is involved in all the usual activities expected of franchised workshops, including training and a screening programme, with—again—a strong commitment to the local community. The main emphasis, though, lies in the promotion of Asian culture.

Mahmood Jamal: 'One of the reasons we came together as an all-Asian collective was because we felt that, in terms of contemporary culture, film and television was a very important medium. Now although Asians had been present in this country for a very long time we were sort of invisible in that particular cultural arena. We were also interested in film-making as a medium in itself, so we formed Retake to intervene in this.'

'Our policy from the start was to aim for two productions a year. One documentary which dealt with issues relating to the community, and one fiction where we'd explore our own aesthetic interests within the perception of our





own experiences. But fiction is obviously more expensive, so sometimes it hasn't been possible. The sponsorship does influence the kind of product you make. Our drama-documentary, *Majdhar*, is the only film we've made entirely through our own ideas. All the other work we've done has been very closely tied to the community here in Camden—except for *Hotel London*, which we did for the national campaign for the homeless, CHAR—and so we've been accountable to them.'

Unlike many workshops, Retake are not especially interested in formal innovation or experiment in their films, and have so far stuck to fairly conventional documentary and drama-documentary formats. They've also kept strictly to fictional realism rather than exploring narrative forms. This runs counter to the trend among the Afro-Caribbean black workshops, who even in their documentary work have tended to use jazzy video artistry in exploring new ways of representing their experience. It's a controversial area, and one which has often been blamed for the general dissatisfaction expressed about the sector's work.

Mahmood Jamal: 'It's a very subjective thing. There's a lot of pressure from people along the lines of "We'll fund you if you innovate". It has its place but I don't want to do it just for the sake of it. In our film *Sanctuary Challenge* which we made with Theatro Technis, we used a mixture of stage drama and straight documentary. The story was about a Cypriot couple who'd taken refuge in a local church because they were going to be deported. We filmed them in the church, then we had to add to their story with the drama because we couldn't film what had happened to them before. It was an innovation, combining drama and documentary in that way, but it grew out of the demands of

the story. Innovation can be both in terms of form and of content—tackling a new subject seems to me just as important. But the right to do these things is one of the things the sector has been fighting for, and people have a right to experiment in those ways.'

In rejecting formal experimentation, though, Retake's work tends to skirt the opposite peril—narrative conventionality that at times borders on dullness. This is partly because, at least to a visually sophisticated viewer, the pace can seem over-slow (a fault to which the whole workshop sector is prone), and partly because the story, deriving as it usually does from some specific local issue, will be situation-driven rather than character-driven. In other words, if you're not already interested in what's happening, you're unlikely to be drawn into it through sympathy with the characters, since you don't gain enough insight into their emotions.

It's a problem of which Retake are aware. 'One thing we've learnt from our own experience is that, because of the

budget and other circumstances, workshop productions are sometimes rather dry. It's not necessarily in the best interest for work to be too localised; even though it may be a particular local issue, it still needs to be accessible to outside people. So one learns from experience how to improve without sacrificing the essential message, and to make things exciting and interesting beyond the local community. However, local needs have to be met as well—who is going to represent the local community if not the workshops?'

For Retake, however, such issues pale beside the more urgent question of their future. All workshops—and most articles about them—spend a disproportionate amount of time discussing funding matters. Channel 4's role in supporting the sector promised stability. Franchised workshops—and it's one reason most workshops are anxious to obtain that status—are bankrolled by the station with general funding not tied to any commitment to specific production projects. It's sometimes suggested that this cushion is in itself one reason for the generally disappointing level of creativity in the sector's work—especially when compared to what is currently being produced elsewhere. In the United States, for example, where one-off funding is the norm, the excellence of each project is what secures the cash for the next one—in other words, you're as good as your last picture. Whether this is in itself a preferable system is of course debatable; it can certainly be accused of favouring safe options over experimentation by discouraging the right to fail.

Meanwhile, Retake are facing up to the imminent disappearance, for better or worse, of Channel 4's cushioning. 'We're not sure why we've been cut. We've always had a good relationship



with the Channel. They've always shown all our films. One thing that's worrying is that now there is no Asian workshop being funded. There seems to be a trend at the moment among the various institutions to see black workshops only in terms of Afro-Caribbean. Recently there was a season of black films at the ICA, partly funded by the BFI, and there were no Asian films included. But the term black is a statement of solidarity and includes both Asian and Afro-Caribbean—it's important to make that clear.

'What we'll do now is try to raise money through other places and to get more commissions. We've always obtained money from sources apart from the Channel. Camden Council have always supported us. We're committed to the workshop ideal and we'll stick it out. Working as a co-op, being democratically accountable, plus making films of a cultural-political nature which aren't necessarily commercial but could be—all that's important to us. We're in a position now to say to other workshops who might be cut that it is possible to survive, to find different ways of getting production money.'

'One thing is clear, for a number of reasons to do with the changing econo-

mic and political climate: there will have to be a re-examination of the Workshop Declaration to enable workshops to raise money commercially or from other sources by seeking commissions, or going into co-productions. We're going to have to live with the realities of a mixed economy. But though things are insecure at the moment, I'm optimistic.'

In a recent article about *Northern Newsreel*, a video series produced by Amber's neighbours, Trade Films, the *Financial Times* observed that work of such imaginative power and impact 'should make the right wing sit up and take notice; because video is becoming the medium of the left, providing a direct channel of communication with the electorate.' There, precisely, lies the undeniable strength of the workshop sector, and for many who work in it such a comment indicates the sole criterion on which their work should be judged. On the other hand, the present system of funding is such that the sector's output, whether they like it or not, is also exposed for comparison and judgment before a national, and often international, audience, and it's in this

arena that criticism tends to be levelled.

The sector, it has to be said, sometimes conveys the impression of a self-protective coterie of film-makers, who have in effect managed to create a smaller pond to be bigger fish in. Allied to this is the fear that in creating a stable and seemingly self-sustaining system, Amber and their North East colleagues have established a model and a working practice to which all other franchised workshops are being obliged to conform, even though it may be detrimental to their particular approach, and even ultimately to the movement as a whole.

The three workshops considered here obviously reflect their own particular circumstances, but have also, I hope, between them illustrated the overall situation within the sector. The key to this situation—funding, again, being the paramount concern—lies within the terms of the original Workshop Declaration: comfortable enough for some, but becoming increasingly restrictive for others. Renegotiation of the terms is obviously needed; but whether, with ACTT embattled, Channel 4 re-Graded, and the entire industry under siege from the press and media barons, it's at all likely, is something else again. ■

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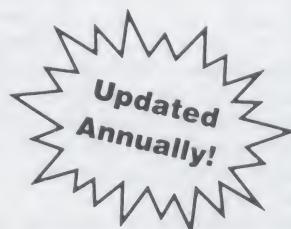
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WORSHIPPING at the SHRINE,

John Boorman

Los Angeles, the whore city, has put on her prettiest frock when the jumbo flops on to the runway after eleven hours aloft—Hockney blue skies, palms aflutter—none of the grey heat haze or bilious smog one has to come to expect. This is the way California is supposed to be and seldom is. Everyone is having a nice day, not just wishing it on others. The usually frosty immigration officers smile us through in a trice.

'Purpose of visit?'

'I've come for the Oscars.'

'You're due one,' he says, stamping my passport.

Alas, my wife Christel's suitcase is missing. It contains a carefully and ruinously (for me) expensive selection of garments to adorn her at the parties, functions and ceremonies that await us. It is still two weeks before the Oscars. Like the Indian rituals I witnessed in the Amazon, a great event is harbingered by lesser ones, a series of initiations and tests to be undergone before the suffering or ecstasy of the great moment itself.

In the grounds of the Beverly Hills Hotel are a cluster of bungalows. Like Marie Antoinette we can play house here, there is a little kitchen and a porch and for \$450 a night we can pretend to be early homesteaders. The rain forests of the world may be disappearing, but they are alive and well in Beverly Hills. It is so lush around the bungalow that we almost need a machete to cut a path to the Polo Lounge.

Christel has gone into mourning for her lost clothes. She has been keening half the night, unable to sleep—dress-lag, I call it.

On 29 March the Academy gave a lunch for the nominees and we dutifully went along and lined up for a group photograph and then traipsed up on stage to be given our certificates by Robert Wise, the eponymously sage president of the Academy. It is like prize-giving at school. We are jolly and well-behaved. After all, many members have yet to vote and we wish to be seen at our very best.

Sam Goldwyn Jr, who is producing the Oscar show, extends the school

analogy with his headmasterly tone. He lectures us about the etiquette of the occasion. 'Don't thank the cast and crew. There are a billion people watching who don't know them and don't care about them. What we want is a moment of wit or emotion. At 30 seconds a red light will flash at you. At 45 seconds it will be solid. At one minute the orchestra will drown you out and we'll take a commercial break.'

So there it is, laid on the line: we are playing bit parts in a TV spectacular. They show us a round-up film of past Oscar winners, the ones who ramble and thank too many people, and the ones to be emulated who get in and get off fast with a merry quip or a tear hastily shed.

There is a lot of kissing and hugging, but the prevalence of contagious diseases has modified Hollywood behaviour, kissing the air rather than cheeks of course, and a technique of hugging which clasps the partner in the arms, but holds the bodies apart. But the beautiful Sherry Lansing, producer of the mega-hit *Fatal Attraction*, and fatally attractive herself, retains her siren status. With her it is lips and the press of correctly curving flesh separated from one by only a film of silk. She reminds me that she offered me *Fatal Attraction* to direct. She is wearing a heady perfume. I think it is the smell of money.

At our table is another woman of power and beauty, Sheila Benson, lead film critic of the *Los Angeles Times*. She has championed *Hope and Glory* and named it her No 1 film of the year. She wears a wonderful hat which somehow reveals what she looked like at sixteen. Franklin Schaffner sits next to her, looking a lot like Patton. Do people grow to look like their films as well as their dogs? Schaffner is sententiously serious and his sentences are over-punctuated, full of expectant pauses that are like phantom pregnancies. I find myself hanging on his words, and finally just hanging there. Michael Douglas looks wan and wanton. He has the movie star gaze, the intimate look into your eyes which does not see you at all, a kind of ocular autograph.



Speaking of which, the autograph hounds are out in force. It is comforting, writing one's name. It reminds me of who I am after being swamped by all those stars. The hounds never look at you, only your hand, writing. They are concerned only with the name on the card. Billy Wilder tells the story of how he was asked by one of them to sign his name three times and on three separate cards. 'Why do you need three of them?' he asked. 'Well,' came the reply, 'for three Billy Wilders I can get one Steven Spielberg.' The paparazzi are ever present as we leave and they snap me out of politeness while waiting for the important stars.

Christel has now used up the one outfit she carried on the plane. Since all the same people will turn up at all the do's this outfit must now be consigned to oblivion.

be elected a member (although a nomination earns automatic entry). Many are very old, tired, conservative and to lure them away from their swimming pools and golf clubs is a massive task. It is ironic that as the movie-going audience gets younger, the Academy membership gets more ancient and the gap between box-office hits and Oscar pictures grows wider.

In between are the critics. They are obliged to see everything and they too vote awards at the end of the year, and they seldom coincide with the box-office hits or the Academy choices. The Los Angeles critics' awards are an influence since most members live in L.A. *Hope and Glory* won Best Picture, Best Director and Best Screenplay in that competition. With the US National Critics Awards, the Golden Globe Best Picture Award, the British Critics' Circle Best

Victor Kaufman, the head of the new merged company, announced Columbia losses of over \$100m.

To its acute embarrassment, Columbia discovered that *The Last Emperor* and *Hope and Glory* made it the studio with the most Academy nominations. Kaufman told the financial press that despite its acclaim Columbia would lose money on *Hope and Glory*. Two weeks earlier, Columbia themselves had supplied us with figures showing that the film was already in profit, with worldwide video, cable, TV to come while still playing in 200 theatres across the United States. When confronted, Kaufman apologised to me 'abjectly' and mumbled that when he spoke of losses he was referring to 'internal accounting'. Meanwhile Columbia's marketing and distribution staffs, demoralised and decimated, had their spending budgets slashed, so that the impression was that Columbia was conducting a closing-down sale before starting again with a clean slate.

To find success in the Oscars, a picture needs the enthusiastic backing of the studio and a readiness to spend. Given the Columbia situation, this seemed unlikely, and so it proved. Jake Eberts, my executive producer, who had put up money to save the production from shutting down at the beginning, now pitched in money to supplement the meagre budget assigned by Columbia for the campaign. After some arm-twisting, Nelson Entertainment, who have the video rights, also made a contribution. Even so, it left us with only a third, or perhaps a quarter, of what other pictures were spending.

I am reminded of Frank Capra's account of his visit to Russia. After talking to Eisenstein he concluded that making films under Stalin was marginally worse than making them for Harry Cohn at Columbia. If he was working for Columbia today he might revise that view in favour of Stalin.

Christel's suitcase has turned up. We came back to the bungalow and there it was on the floor. She fell to her knees, opened it and ran her hands through the silken shards, pressed them to her lips. She looked up at me, tears of joy in her shining eyes. It took her half an hour to try everything on and to decide that after all none of these outfits would do. The bungalow was strewn with discarded garments and she threw herself on to the sofa in despair.

All the nominated films are playing in Los Angeles theatres, but the most brilliant audio-visual experience in town is the Hockney retrospective at the County Museum. The artist gives you a tour on cassette which places the exhibition in time as well as space. It is all about perception. He is helping to liberate us from conventional perspective, and to suggest other ways of seeing the contemporary world. It makes most movies seem creaky and old hat.

Painters have traditionally sought out the beautiful in nature and artifice.

The Emperor's rewards. Photo: AP.



The poll closes on 5 April, so the next few days see the final intensive advertising in the trade press. In the newspapers the presidential election is temporarily usurped by Oscar fever, and like the political candidates, a film needs a lot of money to run a successful campaign. It divides into two parts, the first and more expensive is to get nominations. The biggest slice of money goes on running ads in *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*. These quote favourable reviews and cite other awards already garnered. The first problem is simply to get those 4,000 odd Academy members to see your film, to be aware of its existence. To this end a programme of screenings is arranged so that the members do not have to suffer the inconvenience of going to a regular movie house.

There are some five hundred films released in America each year. How many can one person see? Even newspapers use several critics to cover them. Academy voters tend to be older since it takes some years of distinctive work to

Film Award also in our pockets, we hoped to nudge the voters into recognising *Hope and Glory*'s qualities. These accolades were repeatedly quoted in our ad. campaign.

Other devices are employed. Soundtrack albums are mailed to Academy members, information sheets, books and, recently, video cassettes of the film itself arrive in the post. It probably costs \$80,000 to send a video cassette of a film to all members.

Some of my competitors have spent \$400,000 to promote their claims. Once nominations are achieved, it is safe to assume that most voters will see the nominated pictures, but the barrage of publicity and advertising continues unabated. We had the added problem of struggling with a crippled and depleted Columbia Pictures. After David Puttnam resigned, Columbia was swallowed by Tri-Star. There were mass firings and reorganisation. It took months to find a replacement for Puttnam. The new party line was that Puttnam's regime had been a financial disaster.

Hockney paints the everyday things of our world. He has chosen Los Angeles, which is surely the Capital of the Banal. His work is telling us that even this avalanche of ugliness can be redeemed by art, that even the silly and the banal can be transformed by reflecting the kindness and genius of a Hockney.

In another section of the Rain Forest, Dawn Steel, David Puttnam's successor at Columbia, gives an eve-of-Oscar party in her Bel Air home. In her jungle garden, movie stars, that once endangered species, proliferate. Glenn Close, who got pregnant in *Fatal Attraction*, is heavily and eerily pregnant in real life. If her liaison with Michael Douglas was not dangerous enough, she will film *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* after the baby is born. She asked me to introduce her to my cameraman Philippe Rousselot who will shoot the film for Stephen Frears. I present him. She offers him her face. He surveys it. The appraisal is technical but the moment is potently sexual at the same time.

David Byrne is wearing a Jesse Jackson button, otherwise the presidential campaign is unremarked. The only campaign that counts is this one. I see Dustin Hoffman peeking warily through the palm fronds.

Sean Connery is celebrating his fellow Scot, Sandy Lyle, winning the Masters. Sean says he would trade an

Oscar any time to play golf like that. Shirley MacLaine cannot recall an encounter we had in Dublin. I suggest that now that she has taken to peering into the future she is perhaps forgetting the past. I try again with Tatum O'Neal. 'You won't remember me, but we met when you had just done *Paper Moon*. It was in your father's house.'

'I remember what we said, what I wore, what you wore. I remember everything. That's my problem. I can't forget anything.'

One cannot remember meeting me, the other wishes she could forget. With a crumpled ego I turn to Kathleen Turner, who tells me in pealing tones that penetrate five neighbouring conversations and stop them dead that, 'I have a 5.30 call tomorrow morning. I only came because I heard you'd be here.' Once more I can hold my head up, but suspiciously I asked Bernardo Bertolucci what Kathleen Turner said to him. He will only smile enigmatically, but tells me that he was in analysis for fifteen years. 'Why?' I ask.

'I made beautiful movies but people did not want to see them.'

'Have you stopped now that everyone is seeing *The Last Emperor*?'

'Yes,' he says with a grin.

'So it worked?' I say.

Sean Connery is listening agog. I can see him doing silent mental arithmetic totting up all those fees that Bertolucci paid out over fifteen years.

Sean Connery, *Untouchable*. Photo: AP.



Cher's web. Photo: AP.

The Los Angeles Psychotherapists' Association gave me its 'Courage in Film Making' Award. I hoped a course of treatment might go with it, but alas no. I will have to pay like Bernardo Bertolucci.

I am led over to meet two men who hold court in the garden to an attentive and respectful knot of movie stars and executives. It is a benign group yet subdued, none of the machine-gun laughter and shrill greeting-calls that characterise the rest of the party. They are Roberto Gouzeta and Don Keough who run the Coca-Cola empire. Columbia is a trinket of theirs. These were the men who so impressed David Puttnam, and they impress me too. They have adjoining offices in the Atlanta HQ and the door between them never closes. Roberto Gouzeta is a chemist by training, now the alchemist who guards the magical secrets of the brown syrup. Don Keough's training was as a moral philosopher. They explained that Gouzeta sees each problem in microcosm while Keough is your macro man.

It turned out we all three endured a Jesuit education. We speak of Medieval Disputation, St Thomas Aquinas, Apologetics. People melt away, eyes glazing over. We discuss the nature of imagination, its power. After all, Coca-Cola is an abstraction, an idea incarnate, an American totem. I am awe-struck by these men who are guardians of this mystery. Their aura is more potent than any of these movie stars. Close by Richard Gere has been discussing the movie potential of a novel and his passionate opinions have been overlapping and infiltrating our metaphysics in the way conversations do at parties. Suddenly he aims an imaginary rifle



between us with the words, 'I couldn't do it. I could kill the act but not the actor.'

Christel has been cruising Rodeo Drive and haunting Neiman Marcus, and each day she comes back with a gown or accessory bought, borrowed or exchanged that will finally solve the problem only to find that it does not. Her anxiety is now verging on panic and has the effect of making me calm, almost serene. This agitates her even more.

She even paid a furtive visit to Fredericks of Hollywood, who specialise in exotic underwear for every sexual inclination. She was in search of a particular strapless bra. She came back in a state of shock and reported to me that they were selling edible panties.

'What flavours?' I asked foolishly.

'What flavours? What does it matter what flavours, it's the principle of the thing!'

I kept pressing her and she finally admitted she had noticed strawberry, chocolate and passion fruit among others.

It is 3.30 in the afternoon, a scalding sun burns out of a white-hot sky on the throng of people in the lobby of the Beverly Hills Hotel. They are all in dinner jackets and ball gowns. As Christel climbs into our limo she hesitates and looks me in the eye: 'Now tell me the truth, how do I look?'

She has settled on the very last thing that came to hand, borrowed from a friend. I tell her she is elegant, chic, sexy and sensational. The words, of course, mean nothing. She listens to my tone. Abruptly she turns on her heel and heads back to the bungalow. The limo has to be manoeuvred out of the long line that chokes the hotel driveway. I have a sudden, cowardly surge of hope that we might arrive too late and be shut out and not have to go through it all. She comes back wearing what she intended to wear before we left Ireland, her own design and made by Christine

who lives in our village of Annamoe. It is just perfect.

The stretch limos stretch back in a two-mile jam and crawl to the Shrine Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles where the Oscars are to be held. We edge through a wilderness of dereliction and decay with every window fortified by metal grilles. Black youths stare in at us. Thankfully, the tinted windows preclude them from seeing us in all our finery and hopefully the slowness of our progress may persuade them that it is a funeral procession. Everyone's secret fear is that their limousine will break down in the middle of the ghetto.

It is 90 degrees. The air is more suitable for chewing than breathing. The smoggy sunlight does nothing for the glitzy dresses as the stars alight to a hysterical welcome from fans and media.

The show opens with Sean Connery making a magnificent entrance. He stands stock-still at centre stage, head raised, no longer the man who would be king, but finally the crowned monarch. His subjects rise as one to pay him homage.

Cher arrives late and turns all the heads to see what she is wearing. Sitting behind me I hear Mercedes McCambridge growl. 'That's her thing. Good luck to her, but would you like her to be your mother?'

Later, Pee-wee Herman is hoisted on a wire and suspended over the audience in a rather heavy-handed piece of business. He is directly above us. 'Imagine being crushed to death by Pee-wee Herman,' says Mercedes. 'What a way to go.'

During the commercial breaks we dash out to the bar and often get locked out until the next break, missing some of the action. I was driven away by the musical numbers. From the second row I found myself learning more about the dancers' crotches than I wished to know. As soon as a seat is vacated a 'seat filler' occupies it so that the camera will never witness anything but a full house.

Christel, in an emotional moment, found herself clutching the hand of a large black man who had been assigned my seat while I was outside gulping tepid Californian champagne.

All the nominees are in the front half-dozen rows, but the very front row is reserved for trained extras, their leader wired up to receive radio instructions from TV control. These are the cheerleaders: they start the applause and we all follow suit. If the control room feels that a standing ovation is appropriate, they signal and up jumps row one. We in row two now cannot see, so we stand. The wave spreads back, and there you have it, a standing ovation.

When Cher goes up for her award wearing a tarantula spider's web spun out of beads, she steps on a trailing portion as she passes my aisle seat. A piece rips off and the next time I get up, I step on the beads, losing my footing. I flail my arms to keep my balance. A grim security man starts towards me. In his eyes I could read his mind: 'If this drunken limey starts a scene, boy, will I fix him.'

We endure the three-and-a-half-hour ritual. From leaving the hotel to the end of the Governor's Ball, nine hours have elapsed. Losing gracefully is incredibly exhausting, but right to the end Meryl Streep looks radiant. Even losing, she does better than anyone else. She says she will visit us in Ireland. We all wish we were there now.

Finally, we spill out into the night. There are four hundred and fourteen limousines, each has a number which we are instructed to give to the 'pager', except he cannot be found. Women, hobbled by long, tight satin frocks, wander the vast parking lots calling plaintively for Henry, or Bob, or Buster, as though searching for lost pets. I half expect the drivers to bark back their response. Lacquered hair is showing cracks, sequins are shedding. And out there, beyond, the 'colour' gangs rampage, dealing drugs and meting out random violence.

Soon we are safely back in the Rain Forest. We slip through the bougainvillea, and we are home, in our little 'homesteader' bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, where, if the money holds out, you can live forever.

I console myself that Orson Welles never got one, Hitchcock never got a call, nor did Chaplin. Marilyn Monroe was never even nominated. Somebody said they don't give it to you if you're too good or too pretty. I look at the ravaged face in the bathroom mirror. Well, I certainly don't have Marilyn's problem. And a little voice deep inside says, 'and you don't have Orson's problem either.'

The phone rings. Christel answers it. Her face lights up. She covers the phone with her hand and whispers across to me, 'They loved my outfit.'

Pee-wee and RoboCop. Photo: AMPAS.



This article was first published in the Irish Times.

Cannes 41

P E N E L O P E H O U S T O N

How easy they found it, twenty years ago, to halt the Cannes festival in its tracks. Once it became apparent that no film was going to be allowed to reach the screen in the Palais, that was more or less that. Everyone packed up and went home. That, of course, was the elegant old Palais, which next year will itself be merely a hole in the Croisette. One remembers how outraged its severe doormen were that day, not that the festival had been halted but that sandwiches and Cokes were being carried in with impunity to threaten the upholstery. This year, they might not have taken kindly to the way the Croisette reeked from end to end of a chocolate syrup coating the peanuts on sale at every corner. Even the smell of money, which used to waft so powerfully from the Carlton terrace, was choked out. But Cannes has become tripper-town; and a film festival somewhat in the way that Christmas is a religious festival, needing the symbolic presence of films on cinema screens but not really dependent on them. And, consequently, quite unstoppable.

Twenty years ago, Carlos Saura's *Peppermint Frappé* was the film the authorities failed to get on the screen. This time, the Saura film is *El Dorado*, his retelling of the Aguirre story over which Werner Herzog long ago established proprietorial rights. If they had stopped that screening, who would much have minded? And Jean-Luc Godard, still seeming the spirit of '68, or the ghost of festivals past, is also back, with his *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*, in which he confronts us mainly in profile, talking to a microphone gnomically, characteristically, flatly and it must be said not too enthrallingly about the cinema. 'Dire toutes les histoires des films qui ne sont jamais faits plutôt que les autres. Les autres, on peut les voir à la télévision.' And so on, and so forth.

Then, like a gulp of fresh air, a film, the genuine article. Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, with all its pain and perkiness, its pub sing-songs, flat Liverpool vowels and mean terraced houses, probably looks even more real and remarkable against brilliant Mediterranean sunshine than it would back

home. It's really two films stitched fairly seamlessly together, with Channel 4 bounty continuing where BFI Production had to leave off. 'I make films in order to come to terms with my family history,' says Davies, striking a note more forbidding than his film. 'If there had been no suffering, there would have been no films.' So the memories of the brutish father are still raw and gaping wounds, but there is also a sweetness and humour about the film, a sense of the protective clutter of life in large families. Impressionistically, memories of the 1940s and 50s are picked up, jumbled, discarded, held together by the songs his family grew up with. Like Dennis Potter, Davies knows all about the potency of cheap music—and turns it to more effectively cinematic uses. Above all, this bruised and talented film-maker has that rare awareness of just how long a shot can be stretched and held before a cut: there are three or four transitions here which have the breathtaking sense of rightness measured in millimetres.

Terence Davies is at the stage reached several years ago by another film-maker nurtured by BFI Production, the redoubtable Peter Greenaway. Unquestionably an auteur, much admired by the French, and as clever as they come, Greenaway is at it again, whatever precisely it may be, with *Drowning by Numbers* (or, as the French title has it, *Triple Murder in Suffolk*). There are three leading ladies all called Cissie Colpitts (and splendidly played by Joan Plowright, Juliet Stevenson and Joely Richardson), three husbands in line for drowning, a compliant coroner who seems able to issue death certificates, without going through the formality of an inquest, over any waterlogged corpses encountered in East Anglia, and a small boy who roams the lanes honouring with fireworks any death of rabbit, squirrel, stoat or man. The boy in his spare time invents Greenaway games, of which 'Sheep and Tides', in which the sheep act as tethered tide-tables, holds the most promise. It is all splendid to look at (camerawork by Sacha Vierny), from some opening images of sated insects gorged on over-ripe apples, to the airy country lanes and houses perched like follies by the water-side. What grates about these latter-day

Greenaway films, however, is the extent to which the conceit seems to have turned conceited, even smug. Back at the exhilarating, tentative start of the Tulse Luper saga, the last outcome foreseeable for Greenaway was that he might risk appearing merely the thinking moviegoer's Ken Russell.

Every film festival seems to have, as of right, its good-looking, solemn and rather heavy-handed historical exercise. At Cannes this year it was *L'Oeuvre au Noir (The Abyss)*, directed by André Delvaux and taken from Marguerite Yourcenar's novel about Zénon, the free-thinking alchemist and doctor in sixteenth-century Bruges much harried for his convictions. Sadly, in the respectful circumstances of this sort of adaptation, Delvaux seems to have lost contact with the glancing, unpredictable strengths of his own talent. Gian Maria Volonte, himself these days no actor for the lighter touch, plays Zénon with the faraway look of someone wiser than his times, confronting prejudice, unreason, old memories and the like. 'Zénon is us,' says Delvaux in the course of an interview for the programme booklet. But the trouble is that Zénon isn't us, or anything like us.

Every festival also now has its quota



of films released from incarceration in the Soviet Union—in this case, *Among the Grey Stones*, made five years ago by Kira Mouratova. The difference here is that the director still expresses marked dissatisfaction with her work in its present form, so one can say no more than that this period piece, about the lonely little son of a morose widower and his ramblings with more unbuttoned children, displays undoubtedly talent, of a rather lush and unfocused kind. Once or twice, there is the unlikely sense of a Fellini having a stab at Chekhov—until we're back out of doors with the very small girl who is clearly fated not to last out the picture, and who at moments seems to have been left to her own simple devices, to rather striking effect, as the camera hovers over her infant mutterings and repetitions.

The children in *Salaam Bombay!* are of an altogether more resilient breed, as is the film itself, a highly promising first feature from a documentary director, Mira Nair, who learnt her film-making in the United States. The film is an Indian/French/British co-production—the British element meaning, inevitably, Channel 4, extending

its tentacles to its usual beneficial effect. It's a picture about children surviving in the city, a theme old when Fagin was young, but taking on charges of energy and unfamiliarity from the drive and bustle of Bombay's railway stations, markets and cluttered alleys. Young Krishna, the 10-year-old whose modest ambition is to earn the 500 rupees which will take him back to his mother and his village, is spry as a sparrow, the teaboy as picaresque hero. All the children were recruited from the streets and trained at a special theatre workshop, and we have the director's word for it that the locations of her film are as authentic as they look, not cheated to make for easier shooting. But there's more to *Salaam Bombay!* than spontaneity, street life and a new setting to look at: the film's little plot lines may be standard, but they are engagingly and honestly worked out.

Salaam Bombay! was shown, as was *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, in the Directors' Fortnight, now twenty years old (it was, of course, the festival's answer to 1968) and uncertain about its future home after they pull down the old Palais, where it has happily roosted since the main festival moved into the new one. The Fortnight has a policy, and a spirited one. The festival's competitive selection looks a little more capricious each year. Hollywood star turns (the new films by Robert Redford and Clint Eastwood) are the requisite crowd-pullers. But why such slot-fillers from Europe as Francis Girod's *L'Enfance de l'Art* ('Fame in French,' someone said, 'but much slower') or Vicente Aranda's *Mañana Sere Libre*, a dilatory man-on-the-run yarn about the Spanish folk hero El Lute, who was apparently unwise enough to add a tribe of gypsies to the already large family he was carting round with him? And why then confuse the mix with such an extreme if distinguished oddity and guaranteed crowd-loser as Manoel de Oliveira's *The Cannibals?* Oliveira's

elegantly turned opera of nineteenth-century passions opens with a street crowd, fenced in behind barriers, applauding the principals as they arrive for the grander kind of soirée. Perhaps one remembers this when the real-life cinema audience shortly afterwards takes to its heels around one. Only the happy few, it seems, will stay to be rewarded with the scorpion's sting in the tail of the film, and the jokes that justify the title. I cheated, retreating at half-time but returning for the closing scenes, and as a confirmed opera-hater I'm not the film's best critic. At the least, however, an octogenarian's aristocratic caprice.

Tucked away in a corner of the Palais there was a small exhibition of stills from Antonioni's films; and how vital they looked, flashing reminders of one of the cinema's most insistent visual stylists. All the same, it was a little surprising to encounter strong Antonioni influences still at work in a new film, the Turkish director Omar Kavur's *Gece Yolculugu* (or *Voyage de Nuit*). A film-maker and his screenwriter set out by car to scout for locations, driving off into a landscape as desolate and charged with intimations of loneliness as Antonioni's Po Valley. The writer is brisk and businesslike; the director, in that favourite 60s word, alienated and out of sorts. When their wanderings bring them to a strange empty town, apparently abandoned since the Greeks moved out in the 1920s, the director stays behind, camps out in a derelict church, writes and rambles. Well before the end, the film itself begins to fade away, as though the always rather attenuated motive force had seeped out of it. But the first half is distinctly sympathetic, not least because Kavur's own location-hunting led him to precisely the hallucinatory and melancholy setting he needed.

London should pick up on a programme packaging together three short films about film-makers. Twenty minutes on Souleymane Cissé demonstrates the sheer dedicated obstinacy demanded of the African film-maker; another twenty minutes shows off Sergei Paradjanov, florid and fun, like an Armenian carpet-seller laying out his wares; and a fifty-minute film about Samuel Fuller fielded some of the most simply striking footage seen at Cannes. This was the material which Fuller shot at Falkenau, the death camp liberated by his unit in 1945, with a 16mm Bell and Howell sent him by his mother. The American captain dragooned the solid citizens of Falkenau, who affected ignorance of the horrors on their doorstep, into dressing the corpses and then hauling them on handcarts through the town to decent burial in a cemetery. The young soldier had a film-maker's curiosity: the worn and faded footage is more than a perfunctory amateur record. And the old film-maker now adds a commentary of striking clarity and immediacy, in which horror and anger walk again. A piece of film history, in more senses than one. □

Below left: *Drowning by Numbers*.
Left: *Distant Voices, Still Lives*.
Below: *Salaam Bombay!*



Cannes 41

RICHARD ROUD

This is the European Year of Cinema and Television, of which the high point will be a European Oscar ceremony taking place in November in Berlin. The idea, of course, is to combat the United States' 56 per cent of the world film market. Some have pooh-poohed the whole notion: Jean-Luc Godard said at a press conference at Cannes that this united Europe was no big deal—it just meant turning the clock back some twelve hundred years to the time of Charlemagne, when Europe was indeed united.

But it is a serious problem, as witnessed both negatively and positively in two of the competition films at Cannes. The so-called Italian entry, *Three Sisters* (*Paura e Amore*), was directed by Margarethe von Trotta, with an international cast which includes Fanny Ardant, Greta Scacchi, Valeria Golino and Peter Simonischek. As the English title makes clear (though the Italian doesn't), this is a sort of half-hearted updating of the Chekhov play, set in

the university town of Pavia. The script was written first in Italian (by Dacia Maraini), then translated into German so that von Trotta could work on it, and then translated back into Italian. All the actors were either dubbed or post-synched, and the resulting film is much what one might expect. This is not to say that a foreign director cannot make a film in Italy. After all, the very first film produced by Rizzoli (who produced this one) was the masterpiece *La Signora di Tutti*, directed by Max Ophuls. So it can be done; but it has to be managed with great care, even with genius.

The Danes were wiser than the Italians. *Pelle the Conqueror* is a four-volume novel published in the early years of this century and immediately translated into many languages, including English. Its author, Martin Andersen Nexø, considered second only to Hans Christian Andersen by the Danes, was converted by the October Revolution in 1917 to Communism. He spent much of his life in Russia before finally settling in East Germany, where he died in 1954. It is reported that not only Carl Dreyer but also Roman Polanski and Bo Widerberg have wanted to film *Pelle*, but the rights situation was a complicated one. Finally, the Danish producer Per Holst secured the rights, only to discover when he costed the film that it would have to be a co-production. American and Canadian money was forthcoming, but on the condition that the film be in English. Wisely, Holst held out: the immortal words of Nexø had to be spoken in the original Danish and Swedish. So he settled for filming only the first of the four volumes: better

to have one quarter of a genuine Danish pastry than the whole of a tutti-frutti international patisserie.

The plot of volume one concerns the adolescent, motherless Pelle, who is taken by his ageing father (magnificently played by Max von Sydow) from their poverty-stricken Sweden to the relative prosperity of Denmark. Life on a bleak farm run by a lecher and a martinet is not easy for either the son or the father, but somehow they get through the year, and we can see in Pelle's eyes that this was only the first step in his 'conquest' of the world. The film has done extremely well in Scandinavia, and after winning the Palme d'Or at Cannes it may earn enough elsewhere to enable the director Billie August (*Zappa* and *Twist and Shout*) to move on to the three remaining volumes. Some people found *Pelle the Conqueror* old-fashioned, and they may be right. But then, *Babette's Feast* wasn't exactly an avant-garde picture.

From America, a pair of biographical films: Clint Eastwood's *Bird*, the life of jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, is a very accomplished piece of work, though I cannot altogether subscribe to the European idea of Eastwood as a director to be taken very seriously. Paul Schrader's *Patty Hearst* is more problematical. If imitation were all there is to acting, then Natasha Richardson did a first-rate job as Patty Hearst, as anyone could see who attended the press conference at which both women were present. But Nicholas Kazan, it seems to me, has not written a very interesting part for her. 'The Patty Hearst kidnapping had an unreal quality,' Schrader said. 'Everywhere you went, people asked "What do you think of Patty Hearst?"' His film, however, leaves us still in the dark about what he does actually think.

Left: *Pelle the Conqueror*.

Below left: *Thou Shalt Not Kill*.

Below: Ophuls and guard outside Barbie's first cell.



Three interesting films at Cannes, none of them perhaps entirely satisfactory, were Chen Kaige's *King of the Children*, Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Thou Shalt Not Kill* and (from the 'Un Certain Regard' section) Jeanne Labrune's *Du Sable et du Sang*. Alan Stanbrook has reviewed Chen Kaige's film from the Hong Kong festival (p 150); I would just add that, in spite of its technical excellence, it brought back memories of the forbidding boy-scout qualities of two 'great' classics: Ekk's *The Road to Life* and Konchalovsky's *The First Teacher*.

Thou Shalt Not Kill is part of a series devoted to the Decalogue, and is a very impressive, if grisly film, as one might expect from its initial images of a dead cat and a dead rat. The film has been extraordinarily photographed, using filters and distortions to enhance its atmosphere of nightmare. And it is also an honest work, in that any film which sets out to oppose capital punishment should argue its case not through an innocent victim but through someone who is in fact guilty—in this case of a rather callous murder. There is only one mild attempt to suggest extenuating circumstances: we are told that the teenage lout who brutally kills a taxi driver blamed himself for the death of his beloved younger sister and has never got over it. But for the rest, Kieslowski's film is most powerfully consistent.

Du Sable et du Sang is set in Southern France, where bullfights are still held. It is the story of a doctor of Spanish origins (Sami Frey) and his highly ambiguous relationship with a good-looking young matador (Patrick Catalifo). The doctor has a boyhood aversion to bullfighting, but this does not prevent him from being (sexually?) fascinated by the torero, though possibly unaware of the nature of his own feelings. His wife and his mother (what a joy to see Maria Casares again) are involved in the situation, as is the matador's manager (André Dussollier), and the end of the film is as 'open' as Umberto Eco could wish for. But along the way there are extraordinary scenes, like the one in which Frey plays the violin to a strange flamenco accompaniment on the guitar by Catalifo, and the contrast between two styles of music is counterpointed by the extraordinary complicity between the players. This is Jeanne Labrune's fourth feature; I have not seen any of the others, but she seems to be someone to keep an eye on.

The film I most admired at Cannes was Marcel Ophuls' *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*. Ophuls himself describes it as a thriller of which the outcome is already known, and it might well seem that the material was bound to be altogether too familiar and predictable. Yet I was absorbed for all its four-and-a-half hours, and the reason may be that

although Ophuls' films appear to be little more than talking heads, they are in fact not quite or only that. The director's early experience as a maker of fiction films (*Peau de Banane*, etc), his admiration for the kind of films his father made and for those of his 'idol' Billy Wilder, means that he approaches the putting together of his work rather in the style of a fiction film-maker. He is always very much there in the film, probing like a benevolent dentist. Does it still hurt there? Have you really been brushing your teeth twice a day? Ah, whenever you can, you say. I see (pause). But tell me again, now, when did you join the Nazi party? Oh, the word Nazi doesn't really have much meaning for you. You might as well have become a Rotarian? Yes, I see... But it is not merely Ophuls' own presence that makes his films so dramatic; it is a construction which is usually invisible, and so all the more effective.

Hotel Terminus was entirely American in its financing. (Would you believe that French television, after waiting ten years before screening *The Sorrow and the Pity*, has still not shown Ophuls' film about the Nuremberg Trials?) It is spoken in five languages: German, English, Spanish, Yiddish and French. The print shown at Cannes was subtitled only in French, so it may take a long time before even a John Minchinton gets it ready for British television. But it's worth waiting for. ■

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Jeremy Thomas



PHOTO SARAHAQUILL

The *Last Emperor* won nine Oscars in 1988 because, four years ago, its producer, Jeremy Thomas, correctly assessed the way audience tastes would change. The swing back to old-fashioned craftsmanship, to spectacle and to the romance of history and faraway places, was hardly in sight when the project was conceived. But Thomas got his timing right. A year sooner and he might have ended up with a film like *The Mission*, honoured on the whole by critics but passed over in the major Academy awards and a somewhat disappointing performer at the box office. *Emperor's* fistful of Oscars means that the distributors will get behind it and it should be a big commercial success.

As with all Oscar winners, this gives Thomas (39 this year) an opportunity, possibly unrepeatable in the whole of his career, to do precisely what he wants. It is an enviable moment, but for Thomas also an apprehensive one. For the fact is that he is a producer almost by default. He wanted to be a director like his father Ralph (who made the *Doctor* series) and his uncle Gerald (responsible for endless *Carry Ons*). Jeremy's own films would doubtless have been very different, but it was the family trade and he never envisaged anything else.

There was early, precocious experience, too. With the 16mm Bolex his father gave him, J. Thomas director made his debut at the age of twelve shooting his first spectacle in the grounds of Dirk Bogarde's house. Like many aspiring film-makers, he didn't bother with university but left school at the age of seventeen and went straight into the laboratories at Denham, progressing to the cutting-rooms as an assistant and ultimately full-fledged editor. In those days (the mid-1960s), the editor's bench was a recognised route to the director's chair and Thomas, encouraged by his father, never doubted that he would one day occupy it.

But fate took a hand in the mid-1970s when he met up again with the Australian Philippe Mora, whom he had known as a painter in the swinging London era. Mora was keen to make a Western in Australia with 100 speaking parts and fired Thomas' enthusiasm to act as producer on the project. Thus, with 20-30 local Australian investors put together cottage-style, Thomas made his first movie, *Mad Dog Morgan*, starring Dennis Hopper, in 1976.

Though it was not a big hit, it side-tracked Jeremy Thomas into a rather different career as an independent producer. In particular, he learnt from experience the financial and legal pitfalls into which the novice producer can fall. He innocently sold the rights to the wrong person for a sum that never materialised and litigation subsequently bedevilled the issue.

It was a bad start, but the idea of producing struck an unexpected spark in Thomas. It led to one of the most distinguished, but until lately largely unsung records in recent British film history. As if to compensate for his own deflection from a career as a director, Thomas has worked consistently with talented film-makers. He has made three films with Nicolas Roeg (*Bad Timing*, *Eureka* and *Insignificance*), he produced *The Hit* with Stephen Frears, and he has worked three times with foreign directors: Jerzy Skolimowski on *The Shout*, Nagisa Oshima on *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* and Bernardo Bertolucci on *The Last Emperor*.

It's a tally any film-maker would be proud of, yet Thomas can only half claim them as his own. As he has made fine film after fine film, as it were by proxy, they have come to seem like creative procrastination. Has Thomas put off making his own first film simply because he was rather good in another capacity? Or does he, at bottom, have nothing to say? He claims still to have an unfulfilled ambition to direct and now, surely, is the moment to cross over. It is not, after all, as if it had never been done before, as Alan J. Pakula can bear witness.

Yet Thomas seems loth to seize the initiative. He still talks of the projects he is cooking up with other gifted directors—another film with Oshima, something with Jonathan Demme, even (if it ever gets off the ground) a plan to film *The Naked Lunch*, with David Cronenberg at the helm.

Thomas seems to find it hard to define his own interests in terms that add up to anything like a personal vision. If, as a producer, he has an individual style, he sees it as residing in two qualities: independence and internationalism. He has seldom worked for any of the big studios and has generally regretted it when he has. *Eureka* underwent three changes of regime at MGM during production, the studio lost faith in it and it was pulled from distribution without a proper release in Britain. It confirmed Thomas in his belief that his type of film is best financed outside the studio system. Would he have turned down \$25m if one of the majors had offered it for *The Last Emperor*? The question, fortunately, is academic since none of them did, but Thomas admits that he might have been tempted because the financial world is small for film-makers.

Thomas' notion of internationalism is a penchant for films that involve travel and getting acquainted with foreign countries, especially if they are in the Pacific Basin. He spent a year in Japan for *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, longer in China, all told, for *The Last Emperor*. If three scripts cross his desk and one is about the Far East, he says, that is the one he is most likely to read. Indeed, two of his current projects have Far Eastern settings.

As a creed, though, a compulsion to film exotic people in strange lands

doesn't seem to have a lot going for it. He favours also the metaphysical and the mysterious, he says. Better, but one wants more details. Anything else? Well, he professes an abiding interest in rock 'n' roll, which he once managed to embody in a picture, though with none too happy results. His production *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, directed by the then untried Julien Temple, was temporarily halted by 20th Century Fox after one week's shooting under the original title *Who Killed Bambi?* It starred the Sex Pistols and Thomas now admits that he was charting the unknown in making a film with them. People died during production, anarchy ruled and it proved a chastening experience that he has not tried again.

There's another side to Jeremy Thomas that has rather been mislaid along the way. In his early days as an editor, Thomas worked closely with Kenneth Loach on a number of films, notably *Family Life*. Loach, the committed scourge of modern British society, introduced the 20-year-old Jeremy Thomas to a world of political ideas from which he had been largely insulated in the Home Counties (Buckinghamshire) and public school (Millfield). He was much influenced by Loach at the time and still regards him as one of Britain's finest film-makers. In the end, however, Thomas was not prepared to take as hard a line as Loach and the association came to an end. 'I don't have any really strong political calling of my own,' Thomas says. '*The Last Emperor*, for example, doesn't have a political slant.' Some might argue that it is this blandness, the absence at the heart of the film of any compelling reason to have made it, that constitutes its principal failing.

Perhaps when Thomas was sidetracked from direction to production it was not a diversion at all. Maybe he inadvertently stumbled into the career that is right for his talents. An affable man, with a proper regard for his abilities but none of the industry's customary addiction to hype and self-publicity, Jeremy Thomas has succeeded by building up close associations in influential quarters—not simply through family connections but by a shrewd assessment of the limits of his knowledge. *Mad Dog Morgan* taught him never again to go as a lamb to the slaughter into the field of film finance and distribution. He needed help and friends, and in a quiet but determined way he set about getting them. From his father he learnt that whom you know is more valuable than what you know, so he acquired a knack of dealing with and conveying his ideas clearly to people of widely different backgrounds, from lawyers to bankers and from moguls to carpenters.

When a film is in production, he is on the set every day, not to interfere (he hires Joyce Herlihy as a line producer to see that the director keeps on course) but to demonstrate commitment. He

uses only directors whom he personally likes and considers it his job to help them realise their vision rather than to impose his own. He has studiously cultivated the artists and technicians with whom he has worked and now ranks people like Alan Ladd Jr and Roddy McDowall as friends (they all worked together on McDowall's now almost forgotten directorial debut, *Tam-Lin*).

Equally important, he spends a part of every week cementing friendships in the professions and in the City. Simon Olswang, a budding lawyer whom he bumped into in a company waiting-room in New York, now handles the legal niceties of all Thomas' pictures. Through Sir John Terry, he was introduced to Terry Glinwood, a film salesman who has become his business eyes and ears. Other close associates include Rodney Payne, a merchant banker with Hill Samuel to whom Glinwood introduced him (Hill Samuel led a five-bank consortium that put up the money for *The Last Emperor*), and Brian Quick, also at the time of *The Last Emperor* with Hill Samuel. 'One of my secret weapons,' Thomas freely admits, 'is getting together with people. Movies is a business of people and for me being able to deal with them is the key to it.'

With three children (still too young at ages 10, 5 and 1 to enter the industry, though he'd not discourage them if they showed an inclination), Jeremy Thomas is a modest family man working out of unostentatious offices in Broadwick Street—the kind of no nonsense, feet-on-the-ground figure who inspires confidence among City financiers, who have burnt their fingers too often on fat cigars and ballyhoo.

Thomas' corporate base is a vertically integrated operation called the Recorded Picture Company. Its offshoots include Recorded Releasing, a joint venture with Chris Blackwell, founder of the Island Group, which distributes about eight pictures a year, Recorded Cinemas, which was set up to own two cinemas, the Gate in Notting Hill and the Cameo in Edinburgh, and Recorded Development, which provides seed money for the development of scripts. Unlike many development funds, however, it does not assume a high wastage rate. It embarks on only a few selected projects, working closely with the director from the outset.

Thomas has a tidy mind. He likes to keep people in their compartments and for them to know where they fit in to the picture. Behind his unassuming manner lies a fairly acute sense of his dignity and position. He's quick to react if people step out of line. At the same time, he has an ability to stand outside himself and not take himself too seriously. It's an attractive feature that one hopes he can preserve in the heady context of nine Oscars and fawning film-industry acclaim.

ALAN STANBROOK



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Eisenstein

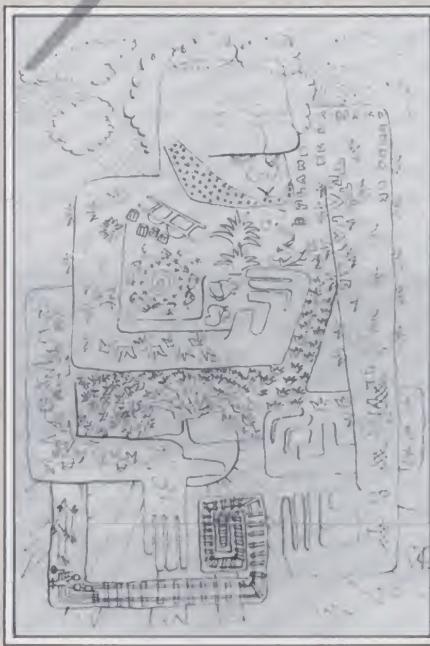
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Ten o'clock on a cold November morning in Moscow last year. The ice crunches underfoot as we cautiously make our way from the metro, past children playing in the snow outside modern apartment blocks; then through an unexpected grove of spindly trees, as if leaving the modern city behind, to a squat nineteenth-century facade in the standard dusty yellow livery of such buildings. This is the Central State Archive for Literature and the Arts—TSGALI in equally standard Soviet acronym code—and it is where the bulk of Eisenstein's vast paper legacy is preserved.

Two months earlier in London, Naum Kleiman, curator of the Eisenstein 'scientific-memorial cabinet' (as the tiny Smolenskaya museum is officially known) and guardian angel of Sergei Mikhailovich's 'afterlife', recalled for an NFT audience his surprise on realising the sheer scale of the legacy. He had been one of the small group of film school students from VGIK in the late 1950s who helped Eisenstein's widow Pera Attasheva safeguard the material she had rescued and prepare a selection of the writings for publication. But it was not until he first stood in the archive, surrounded by folders containing thousands of drawings and pages of untranscribed manuscript, that he realised how utterly false was the still-prevalent rumour of Eisenstein's 'laziness'.

Whether TSGALI would be as user-friendly without Naum's introduction we could only guess. But here he is a 'family' friend of twenty years standing, and the Director, Madame Volkova, positively radiates enthusiasm, offering us the use of her office to spread out the drawings we have come to examine. For this visit marks the start of the final phase of nearly five years preparation to mount in Britain a major exhibition based on Eisenstein's drawings and designs. Only once before, in a small exhibition at the V&A in 1961, have the drawings been seen publicly here; and in that interval the scope of Eisenstein studies has changed dramatically. Now David Elliott, Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, and I have come to select the core of what will be shown in Oxford, London and Manchester from July 1988 to February 1989.

Soon the notebooks and mountains of folders begin to arrive—followed by a samovar and a regular supply of *piroshki* and cakes—and we are plunged into three days of highly privileged intimacy



Eisenstein self-portrait and location map for *Que Viva Mexico!*

with the 'old man'. Appropriately, the portrait hanging above us in Madame Volkova's office is of Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Arts and Education Minister or 'Commissar for Enlightenment', who did so much to defend the 1920s avant-garde against Bolshevik conservatism (and often against his own preferences)—the same Lunacharsky who boldly hailed *October* as an 'enormous triumph', a 'symphony' after the 'étude' of *Potemkin*, when it was being assailed from both left and right. What would he have thought, I wonder, of the fate that befell Eisenstein soon after his own death in 1933, or of the later twists and turns of reputation which have buffeted the Soviet era's greatest film-maker?

As we plan the exhibition and related celebrations of this double anniversary—the 90th of his birth and 40th of his death—the problem of Eisenstein's reputation looms large in my mind. Is there not, behind the routine acknowledgment of his 'genius', in reality considerable indifference or even hostility? Like the two great popular film-makers and near-contemporaries he was proud to call friends, Chaplin and Disney, his very familiarity and universality has bred a kind of automatic critical contempt. It seems no coincidence that, while Disney's Silly Symphony characters are more commonly found on tee shirts than on the screen and Chaplin's immortal Tramp is

pitching for IBM, Eisenstein's Odessa Steps are more often pastiched—recently in De Palma's *The Untouchables*, Rybczynski's *Steps*, even in *Neighbours*—than revalued.

Consider the stereotypes we are offered: Eisenstein the starry-eyed Bolshevik idealist, purveyor of consoling fairytales from *Potemkin* to *Alexander Nevsky*; Eisenstein the montage maniac, trying to reduce, or derive, the whole of cinema from his simplistic A+B=C formula; Eisenstein the innocent, so unable to cope with the practical realities of Hollywood, Mexico or Moscow in the 1930s that he failed to get any film made for nearly a decade after *The General Line*—or, a variation, the theorist who preferred pontificating to making movies; and Eisenstein the crypto-romantic, who 'never really understood Marxism or dialectics and eventually succumbed in his last films to operatic spectacle. Caricatures perhaps, but I suspect indicative of the attitudes that until recently have stifled continuing research on Eisenstein, especially in Britain and America.

In part, this is no doubt a reaction against the centrality of 'montage' in the Rotha/Film Society/Lindgren tradition of 'film appreciation'. And indeed few of my generation could fail to sympathise with the roasting of such familiar montage chestnuts as the stone lions in *Potemkin* in a revisionist textbook like Victor Perkins' *Film as Film*, first published in 1972. Perkins was echoing the great paradigm break signalled by Bazin's 1955 epitaph on the montage tradition: it 'did not give us the event; it alluded to it.' Henceforth we were free to savour the formerly despised delights of 'impure' cinema, with its variety of vernacular realisms. And as for Eisenstein's remaining revolutionary credentials, even these came under suspicion in the early 1970s when Vertov's intransigent rejection of all fiction gained favour, at least in some quarters, as a standard by which Eisenstein was found compromised. According to Godard, circa 1970, 'there was a big difference between [Vertov] and those fellows Eisenstein and Pudovkin, who were not revolutionary.'

Such polemics soon seemed absurd, but their influence left Vertov 'closer' to our era than Eisenstein. Yet the abundant evidence of Eisenstein's belatedly published writings, his copious drawings, correspondence, teaching, even the fragments of film since added to his bare 1948 canon, should make him our



contemporary. And to reproach our Anglo-Saxon sloth, there is a rich new critical and textual literature dating back over twenty years all around us—from the Soviet Union, France, Germany, Italy, India—while we have had to make do with our vintage *The Film Sense*, *Film Form* and (intermittently) *Film Essays*.

'I never learned to draw'

Eisenstein drew constantly, almost automatically, for all but about six years of his life. As a child, he filled notebooks with meticulous and ambitious caricatures, strip cartoons, fantastic compositions (two of these notebooks

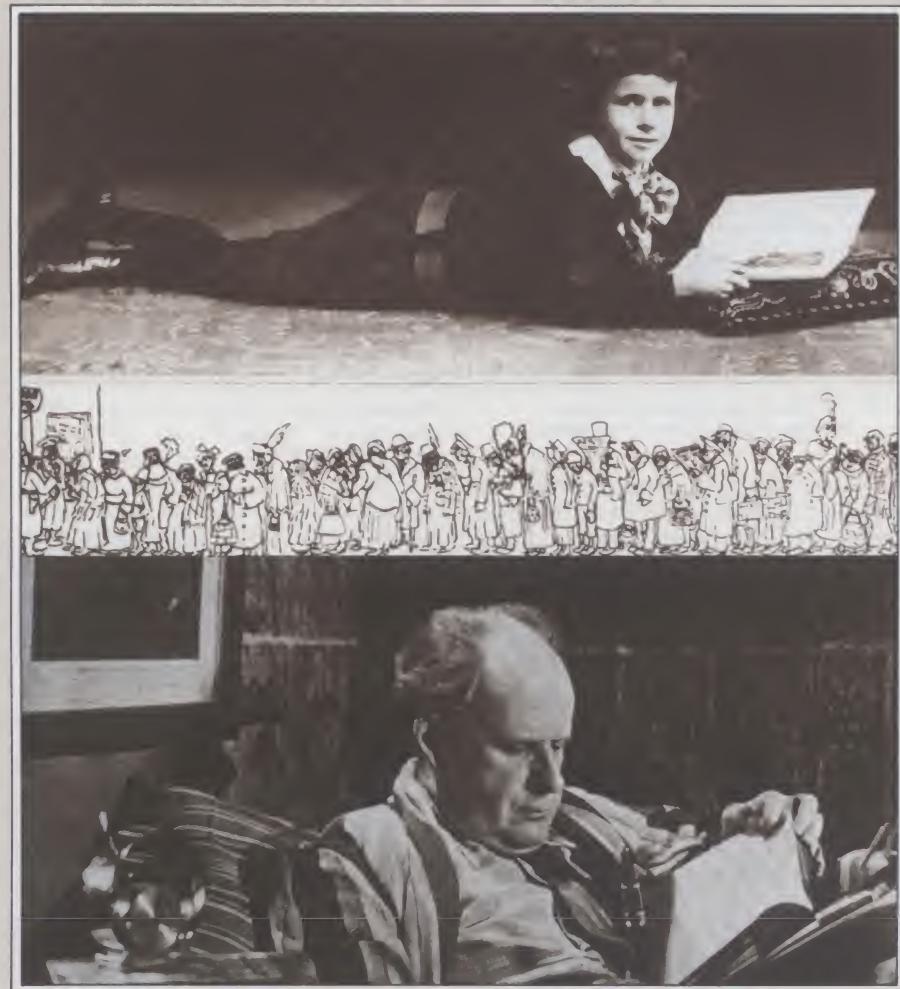
The gap was from 1924 to 1930, when he plunged into film-making and produced four masterpieces in breathless succession. Did he abandon drawing simply because he was too busy, or because the new medium satisfied in a different way the impulse which underlay his incessant line drawing? In a crucial chapter of the *Memoirs*, he makes a rapid, tantalising connection between childhood delight in the vitality of line drawings, this linear contour as 'the trace of movement' (and incidentally his 'rapturous' discovery of analytical geometry) and *mise en scène* considered as the 'lines of the actor's movement in time'. So there is indeed a continuity from Eisenstein's precocious

theatre work has yet to be acknowledged: it amounts to a virtual encyclopedia of the stylisation current in early Soviet theatre—by turns Cubist, Constructivist, Cubo-futurist, traditional *commedia dell'arte* and pantomime, American dime-novel 'realistic' and Gogolian grotesque. But this was functional, generic illustration. And as he makes clear in the *Memoirs*, it was 'pure' line drawing that truly fascinated him. In fact he seems not to have pre-visualised any of the films before *Alexander Nevsky*; and only *Ivan the Terrible*, which he also scripted very formally in Old Church Slavonic, was exhaustively story-boarded.

So cinema was, in the phrase used as the title of a book by his pupil Vladimir Nilsen, at least potentially a 'graphic art', while theatre was impure, volumetric—the equivalent perhaps of Diego Rivera's 'thick, broken strokes' (and indeed his only late theatre drawings, for the Bolshoi *Die Walküre* in 1940, are unusually textured). But it was during his fourteen months in Mexico, where he met Diego and the other revolutionary muralists, that Eisenstein underwent some kind of creative epiphany, which started him drawing again with an intensity that was to continue for the rest of his short life. Again the connections he himself made are tantalising. Mexico was a "paradise regained" of graphic art; its elaborate primitivism and religiosity interlaced with sensuality clearly reconnected Eisenstein with some thread broken during the emotional traumas of his childhood. Thus the vast quantity of Mexican drawings includes both delirious conflations of the spiritual and the erotic, as in the *Adoration of the Matador*, *Crucified Bull* and 'Synthesis: Eve, Europe, Jesus, Torero', and exercises in his most abstracted 'mathematical' style to date [here and elsewhere, quotation marks indicate a title given by Eisenstein; a majority of the titles written on drawings from all periods are in languages other than Russian, often English].

Not that this 'correct' style, as he considered it, lacked passion. On the contrary, as he laconically noted, 'the effect is particularly strong when this abstract ("intellectualised") line is used to delineate highly sensual relationships between human figures, usually in some bizarre or improbable situation.' This is precisely the formula for his extraordinary series of drawings based on the motif of Duncan's murder by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. These are at once the most 'purified' of all his closed-line drawings, less influenced by the Mexican surroundings than by Eisenstein's deep interest in Chinese and Japanese art. The dates on each drawing show that as many as ten were done on some days, and the whole corpus must run to some hundreds of variations on the theme of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's simultaneous guilt and

Eisenstein, 1910 and 1942; and an example of youthful 'typage'.



have been preserved, apparently by his mother). Later he edited the school magazine, publishing many of his own drawings; and by 1917 he was selling his sophisticated political cartoons, now signed with the punning pseudonym 'Sir Gay', to leading Petrograd magazines. Then the final throes of the war and the Revolution rescued him from civil engineering studies and offered a magical escape into the theatre. From 1918 to 1924, his graphic skills took him from the amateur fringe to the heart of a theatre undergoing its own revolutionary upheaval amid the chaos of the Bolshevik Revolution.

childhood caricatures to the markedly graphic dynamism of especially his silent films; and many fascinating anticipations of motifs in the films, like the metamorphosis series which foreshadow passages of 'intellectual montage' and the early appearance of many 'typage' characters familiar from the films (some based on his own family, it becomes clear).

In this trajectory, the period of theatre design and production stands apart, not least because it required him to use colour and imply volume, whether in costumes or set designs. The range and inventiveness of Eisenstein's



exultation at the murder and their accession to power. Some sequences emphasise the savagery of the killing, its mechanics and Lady Macbeth's—even Duncan's—collusion in it. Others concentrate on the erotic excitement of the Macbeths; and yet other grotesque and ironic suites explore anachronistic (a post-coital cigarette!) and art-historically allusive variations.

These remarkable drawings shed considerable light on the peculiar relationship between the analytic and the affective in Eisenstein's sensibility. While perhaps appearing more experimental than confessional, they suggest a passionate intellect restlessly, obsessively discovering and trying to solve the equations of sexual polarity. Other drawings from this extremely fertile period include some elaborate self-portraits (a thesis subject in itself) and the 'Ecstasy' series, which prefigures later attempts to represent complex theoretical ideas in symbolic form. After his return to Moscow and the realisation, amid show trials and purges, that he would never be allowed to finish *Que Viva Mexico!*, Eisenstein confided his bleakest emotions to drawings like 'Despair' and 'Changing the Brain' (a sinister mannikin at work). He also threw himself into renewed theoretical work and condensed his whole aesthetic system into a celebrated drawing, titled (in English) 'The Building to be built', which is a kind of Masonic temple—or Renaissance memory theatre—blueprint for the perfection of art and cinema.

For years Eisenstein's drawings have been spoken about in conspiratorial whispers, their brazen blasphemy and playful lubricity an open secret among the initiated. But they have rarely been given their due as a vital 'third leg' of Eisenstein's tripartite work, alongside the films and writings. The intriguing discussion of his attitude to drawing already quoted has the ironic title 'How I Learned to Draw—A Chapter about Dancing Lessons' and its theme is that drawing and dance spring from the same linear, rhythmic impulse. The young Eisenstein failed as dismally to learn formal dancing as he did academic still-life drawing; but he could embroider the foxtrot as fluently as his improvised line danced on paper. Instinctively rejecting what can be taught, his method in all creative work was to let loose a 'capricious flood' of images, words or drawing, then seek new ways of sculpting and segmenting the torrent.

What however will always elude analysis is the stuff of the flood, the 'protoplasmic' element which is shaped by the creative urge. And here Eisenstein's drawings are of special interest, because they spring from a level of consciousness which is prior to conceptual thought—instinctive, fantastical, uncensored. In his drafts for an unfinished essay on Disney, there are fascinating observations on the appeal

of the 'plasmatic' in Disney's early animation: the infinite flexibility of figures, their interchangeability with natural objects, and ability to collapse and reassemble at will. 'Disney . . . is a complete return to a world of complete freedom.'

Eisenstein scrutinised his own drawings with the same passionate curiosity, trying to explain the surprising impact of his minimal 'closed contour' style and analysing the magic of seeing something *come into being* before our eyes without any of the apparatus of illusionistic draughtsmanship. Again, the double fascination of creation *ex nihilo* and of analysing its elemental forms; and we can trace the same theme through his interest in 'inner speech'—the mind's semi-conscious dialogue with what stimulates it—to the experiments in correlation between visual and auditory rhythm (Jay Leyda records that a favourite quotation was Stevenson's 'visible sounds and audible colours').

Birth, creation and the free play of the unconscious all figure prominently



The lure of *Macbeth*, 1931.

in Eisenstein's approach to drawing; and they also point towards his intense interest in the 'return to the womb', a complex studied by Freud's followers Rank and Sachs, and located at the core of Eisenstein's psychology of art by Håkan Lövgren in his stimulating essay 'Trauma and Ecstasy'. Significantly, 'How I Learned to Draw' ends with an evocation of 'that happy stage . . . when . . . we dream in the warm wombs of our mothers,' a stage which can later only be approximated in the pleasure of graphic or autobiographical free association.

Paradise Regained

There is much to learn from the drawings—of which an accessible, reasonably comprehensive edition is urgently needed (little has changed since Albera's survey 'Eisenstein et la question graphique' in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, December 1978)—not least the different perspective they give on

Eisenstein's career. Western scholarly opinion has largely adopted a consensus on the radical 'early' and mystical 'late' periods, corresponding roughly to the 1920s and the 40s, separated by little more than a traumatic chasm occupying the 30s. Yet the 'paradise regained' of graphic art that Mexico inspired, alongside (not instead of) the multi-layered conception of *Que Viva Mexico!*, marked a vital breakthrough for Eisenstein. Henceforth he was able at least to bring together, if not unite, logic and emotion in his work, making the 30s in many ways his most productive decade.

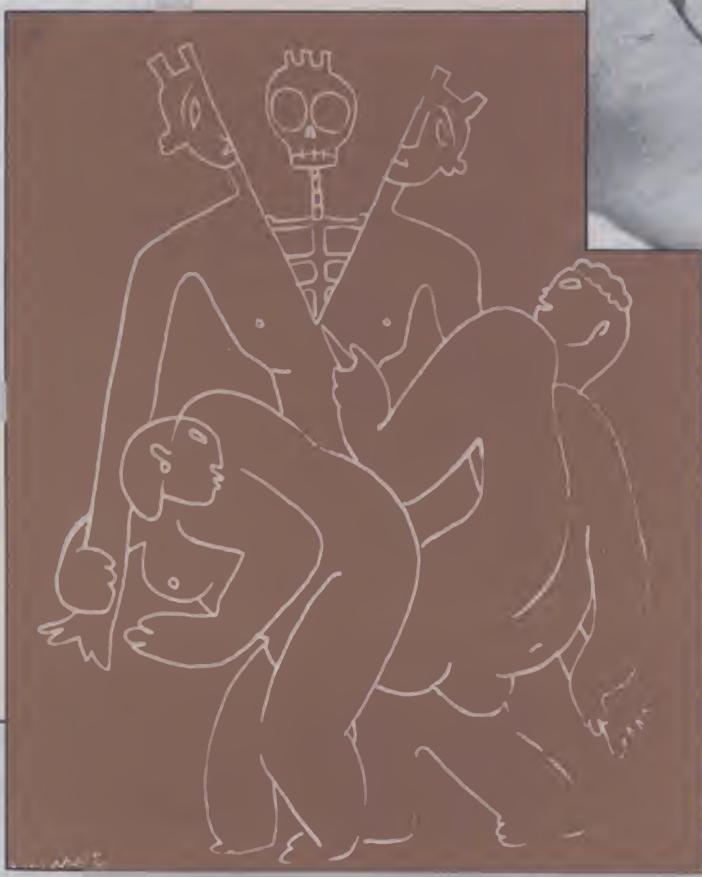
If this sounds scandalous, it is perhaps because we have grown accustomed to categorising whole decades and applying simplistic criteria to circumstances very different from our own. Many Soviet artists in other fields, though few in cinema, lost careers and lives during the 1930s. And for Eisenstein it was certainly a time of public defeat—with *Que Viva Mexico!* confiscated, *Bezhin Meadow* twice completed then shelved, and at least two other major projects, the comedy *MMM* and *Ferghana Canal*, blocked. But the very scale of these projects also made it an astonishingly creative period, even if this creativity stemmed in part from acute frustration. Shklovsky maintained that the books Eisenstein wrote were the films he didn't make, and certainly *Direction* was begun after the cancellation of *Bezhin Meadow*; but Naum Kleiman also reminds us that it was his books which saved Eisenstein from creative compromise and despair.

If the year 1931 spent in Mexico is one pivot for a revised understanding of Eisenstein, then 1946 is the other. It was on the night of 2 February, after completing work on *Ivan the Terrible Part II*, that Eisenstein went to a celebration of the Stalin Prize already awarded to Part I and suffered a heart attack while dancing at the party. (Truly, dancing and drawing did seem to mark the boundaries of his life—his last gesture, two years later, was a line scrawled across the manuscript he was writing at the moment of death.) Within weeks, he learned that Part II had displeased Stalin intensely, and much of the next year was spent negotiating and hoping to be allowed to mollify this most terrifying critic. But *Ivan Part II* was still banned at his death and remained so until 1957—the year after Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to the CPSU 20th Congress, in which he singled out Stalin's obsession with cinema as a means of self-delusion (e.g. the *kolkhoz* musicals) and self-glorification.

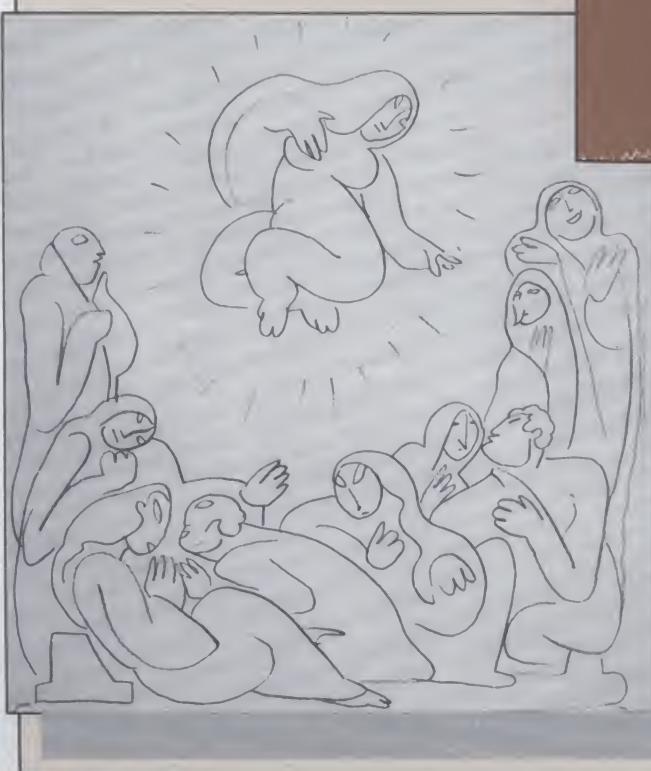
Thus the triumphant international release of *Ivan Part II* in 1958 came to form part of Khrushchev's 'Thaw', along with such conciliatory new Soviet films as *The Cranes Are Flying* and *The Ballad of a Soldier*. But the world in which this Rip Van Winkle Part II appeared was very different from the one in which Eisenstein had carved his



Left: The release
of Mexico. Right:
Costume for Mr Kelly
in *The Mexican* (1920),
Proletkult Theatre.



Above: Duncan and the Day
of the Dead, 1931.
Left: Confluences of the
spiritual and the erotic.
Right: The little boy
from Riga.





THE MEXICAN



Left and Below: Eisenstein,
the director of actors.
(Jay Leyda's location photos
of Bezhin Meadow, 1937.)
Bottom: Portrait of the artist.





tortured, dangerous and intensely personal epic. Italian neo-realism had created a new taste for *plein air* simplicity and seemingly artless acting, while the first stirrings of what would soon be hailed as the French *nouvelle vague* were already in the air—both phenomena linked by the advocacy of André Bazin and his young disciples.

In this context, *Ivan Part II*, now titled *The Boyars' Plot*, could scarcely appear as other than an anachronism—the long-awaited completion of the known Eisenstein canon, itself something perceived as firmly rooted in the silent era of heroic montage and only reluctantly accommodating synchronised sound by resort to the historical and operatic distanciation of *Neuksy* and *Ivan*. This Part II did not even correspond to the original published script (summarised in Marie Seton's 1952 biography), covering as it did only the Boyars' intrigue up to its ironic denouement, when the Church's chosen assassin kills Ivan's would-be successor Vladimir, instead of the Tsar.

Missing was the whole subsequent narrative of how Ivan quelled the uprisings fermented elsewhere against him and savagely sacked the city of Noygorod, before prostrating himself in front of a giant fresco of the Last Judgment and begging forgiveness of the Tsar of Heaven. But it was already known that Eisenstein had changed his mind many times on the final structure of *Ivan*. And in this claustrophobic, if truncated version of Part II there were at least two important bonuses: the poignant scenes of Ivan's childhood in flashback, witnessing his mother's murder and suffering the Boyars' taunts, originally intended for Part I; and Eisenstein's sole use of colour, for the feast of the *oprichniki* (whose uninhibited revelry, including Fedor Basmanov's oriental-style drag turn, had almost certainly prompted one of the Central Committee's original criticisms of the film).

It was inevitable that *Ivan* in 1958 would be viewed in a broadly Shakespearean (or Wagnerian, or even Miltonic) light, given the virtual suppression of Eisenstein's writings since 1946. The visual and dramatic rendering of a Renaissance world emerging out of the Byzantine shadows of Ivan's feudal palace; the actual mention of Hamlet (albeit pejoratively) in the Central Committee's condemnation of the portrayal of Ivan; the close integration of Prokofiev's music and the balletic swirl of colour in the feast—all these encouraged the view that Eisenstein had turned decisively away from analytic montage towards an operatic synthesis. And of course it was equally inevitable that the shadow of Stalin would lie across the film. How could it not be seen as either a brave critique of Ivan's latter-day heir, or an apologia for that tyrant? But equally such considerations were unlikely to focus atten-



At the opera.

tion on the actual substance or style of the film which, ritual pieties aside, probably seemed to many, as it did to Dwight Macdonald, 'more like pageant (a dull genre) than cinema.'

Similar problems surrounded the next milestone in Eisenstein's posthumous rehabilitation: the publication of a six-volume Russian *Selected Works* between 1964-71. That this happened at all was a tribute to Pera Attasheva's determination to restore his reputation and commemorate his extraordinary gifts as an art historian, philosopher and polemicist, as well as a film-maker. Apart from the screenplay of *Ivan the Terrible*, published in 1944, one book of essays edited by Yurenev in 1956 was all of Eisenstein's writing that had appeared in the Soviet Union before 1964. Despite the numerous articles which had appeared in journals and newspapers, neither of the two major books, *Direction and Method*, that he laboured on in the 30s and 40s respectively was in readily publishable form. So the strategy of the *Selected Works* was to 'sample' these theoretical works as an interim measure. And since there was no existing Soviet biography, the remarkably frank memoirs which Eisenstein had mostly written while convalescing in 1946-7 were pressed into service as an impromptu autobiography, appearing in Volume 1.

At this point the story gets complicated (undoubtedly another thesis subject). When the *Memoirs* typescript was

Costume sketch, *The Mexican*.



originally cut up and assembled in roughly chronological order, the intended sequence was unclear—although from the free association form of the individual chapters it could certainly not be chronological. When the Eisenstein archive was moved to TSGALI after Pera Attasheva's death in 1965, Naum Kleiman started to collect fragments which were not included in the first published edition and soon discovered that Eisenstein had actually left gaps in the sequence of the *Memoirs* for 'theoretical' articles already published elsewhere, sometimes in altered form. Meanwhile the covers of notebooks had been found, papers and inks compared, and the order of composition could be used as further evidence of how Eisenstein planned his 'comic autobiography' or 'Portrait of the Author as a Very Old Man'.

We owe these characterisations to Leyda's treasure-trove *Eisenstein at Work*, co-edited by Pera's sister Zina Voynow in 1982, together with confirmation of the influence of Mark Twain's *Autobiography*, written 'from the grave'. Considering himself theoretically dead after the heart-attack in 1946, Eisenstein determined to 'drift in the vortices and whirlpools of free association', fascinated by the 'shameless narcissism' of what emerged in the literary equivalent of his private drawings. The memoirs are 'immoral', not because they reveal 'the amorous episodes in the life of a Russian film director', but because they don't moralise, prove, explain or teach—as did most of Eisenstein's public activity. Instead they are the equivalent of browsing through one's past, as through bookshops, museums and waxworks (how revealing are those metaphors of self-presentation!) in search of a life that seemed to have slipped from its owner's grasp.

Comparisons apart—whether with Frank Harris, Twain, Joyce, Cellini or whoever—Eisenstein's memoirs are clearly indispensable for scraping away the accretions of myth and supplying the subjective dimension that has long been missing from our understanding of this most officially employed of artists. They also seem to be brilliantly written. However it is the misfortune of English-language readers that, just when Kleiman had succeeded in piecing together their most authentic order and scope possible, and arranging for this to be first published in German translation as *YO! Ich selbst* (GDR, 1984), what should appear almost simultaneously but *Immoral Memories*, a belated English translation of the now-discredited 1964 version.

Herbert Marshall, the translator of this poorly edited, axe-grinding edition, claims that it was completed ten years earlier (i.e. around 1973), which may explain why the fruits of Kleiman's scholarship were not incorporated. But another reason might be that the 1964



Memoirs effectively predate the Berne Convention on copyright, and are thus free to any western publisher, while the nearly one-third more material included in *YO! Ich selbst* (a characteristically polyglot and arresting title suggested somewhere by Eisenstein) would have to be bought. At any rate, it is a sad reflection on the lack of East-West coordination that such an avoidable blunder should have occurred—especially since the 1978-80 French edition of the *Memoirs* had already made considerable use of the revised ordering and interpolated material.

Film Sense

Being able to read more of Eisenstein is one thing; seeing more, especially of what was believed lost or destroyed, is something else. Found film conveys an undeniable *frisson*—the sense of time recovered. Here, as elsewhere, we owe almost everything to the initial tenacity of Pera Attasheva and the imaginative devotion of her heir, Naum Kleiman.

The first of the posthumous discoveries was handed, literally, by Attasheva to Kleiman in the early 1960s. It was a box of single frames taken from individual shots of *Bezhin Meadow*. When this controversial production had been finally suspended in March 1937, all the material was preserved in a high-security archive, which then unfortunately suffered a direct hit during the war. Attasheva, however, had worked on the film as an assistant, and she had kept these single frames. Kleiman remembers his hands shaking with excitement as he took the box; and before long he was pondering how to make public this palimpsest of Eisenstein's great Oedipal drama. An illustrated album was the first solution, but he felt that these precious images needed light projected through them. When printed out as lengths of film, they could be experimentally ordered and edited, and soon a reconstruction was secretly under way at the Soviet archive Gosfilmofond. Eventually he brought in Sergei Yutkevich, an old colleague of Eisenstein's from their theatre days and now chairman of the committee overseeing his legacy, and *Bezhin Meadow* was reborn in 1967 as a 30-minute compilation.

The result has, as David Robinson wrote at the time, 'a force and plastic beauty which makes one regret bitterly what must have been Eisenstein's finest film.' In this, he thought, Eisenstein had transcended both montage formalism and the somewhat exotic pictorialism of the Mexican footage as it has become known to us. Here would have been a chance before the historical stylisation of *Nevytsky* and *Ivan* to see Eisenstein's early 'sound style' (he had been impatient to use sound since 1929) and to discover the depth and brilliance of his work with the actors, which is apparent even from stills. All of which is true, but perhaps ignores the fact

that this too was a highly stylised film, drawing on Eisenstein's passionate interest in classic and popular religious imagery. For *Bezhin Meadow* may have been the story of a Young Pioneer hero on a kolkhoz, but it is also the parable of Abraham and Isaac secularised and there can be little doubt that Shumyatsky's fears over the intensity of religious and anti-religious imagery had some basis.

Two further discoveries from the archives have also served to emphasise how important acting—and actors—were to the maestro of 'typage'. Indeed, one of the most persistent myths about Eisenstein which needs to be dispelled is his alleged disregard for professional acting. A 1926 essay included in the BFI's new *Selected Writings 1922-34* sings the praises of Kuleshov's partner Alexandra Khokhlova and insists that as the 'only original' Soviet actress she could 'create a whole genre' of films. But the chance rediscovery in 1977 of Eisenstein's very first film, the spoof



Vera Yanukova in *Enough Simplicity*.

Glumov's Diary filmed in a day in 1923 as an insert for the stage production *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man*, drew attention to another actress who remained important to Eisenstein and faithful to his lessons well into the 30s.

Vera Yanukova was a member of the Moscow Proletkult Theatre troupe which Eisenstein directed from 1922-4 and, as Naum Kleiman illustrated in his NFT lecture, there is a line of development from the broad slapstick of *Glumov's Diary* to her sophisticated switching of styles within a sequence a decade later in Piscator's *Revolt of the Fishermen*. This line is the development of Eisenstein's thinking about montage, which had far outgrown its origins in his theatre work and later identification with an editing style.

Does it still make sense to speak of 'montage' in connection with *Ivan the Terrible*? Many would doubt it, but another fragment which has come to light, from the supposedly lost Part III, throws into contrast two high-definition acting styles and makes this seem more

plausible. In the confrontation between the German knight Staden and Tsar Ivan, which consists mainly of grotesquely lit looming close-ups and lacks any music, Kleiman reads a juxtaposition of two 'eccentric' acting traditions: Cherkasov's Leningrad stage training and Yakov's long association with Kozintsev and Trauberg's FEKS group. Here an isolated sequence can perhaps help us see more clearly what is otherwise obscured by spectacle and expectation. But another surviving off-cut from *Ivan* shows a late example of typage: this consists of Mikhail Romm's screen-test to play Elizabeth I—the 'Ginger Bess' of Eisenstein's childhood reading—in drag!

Kleiman believes that there may yet be more film to unearth: he still hopes to find some of the test footage shot for *Ferghana Canal*. Apart from its purely antiquarian interest, the value of all such material for us is that it helps reopen debate which, in most cases, ceased even before Eisenstein's death, and was never on the agenda for a postwar generation. What then will we make of the embarrassment of theoretical writing now becoming available?

According to Kleiman's estimate, what has so far been published in Russian amounts to little more than a quarter of Eisenstein's known writing. A further twelve substantial volumes are currently planned to supplement the *Selected Works* and these will still not include the VGIK lectures or director's working notes. Ultimately he foresees twenty volumes, with several more devoted to the drawings (of which three limited-edition facsimile portfolios have so far been produced). Meanwhile, a steady stream of articles, notes and correspondence excavated from the archive has appeared in Soviet publications since the mid-50s, details of which appear in Leyda's invaluable checklist 'The Published Writings (1922-82) of Sergei Eisenstein' (included in its final update as an appendix in the 1982 edition of *Film Essays and a Lecture*). All too few of these have yet appeared in English, while France and Germany, having lagged behind the early Anglo-American lead established by Leyda's three pioneering collections, began to forge ahead in the 70s with multi-volume editions based on the Russian *Selected Works*, also supplementing this with later additions to the canon.

It was no doubt impatience with the slow progress of other pieces into English, after his 1982 *Eisenstein at Work*, that led Leyda and translator Alan Upchurch to start a series of eclectic exhumations for the Calcutta publisher Seagull Books. First came *On the Composition of the Short Film Scenario* (1984); then *A Premature Celebration of Eisenstein's Centenary* (1985), which included an extensive correspondence with his early mentor and lifelong confidante Esfir Shub. The latest in the Seagull series is *Eisenstein*



on Disney, a superbly edited and illustrated collation of drafts for an ambitious essay dating from 1940-1, with *On the Detective Novel* and the new expanded memoirs announced as forthcoming. Also in the future lies the completion of the BFI's (currently) three-volume edition, of which the first, *Selected Writings 1922-34*, was reviewed in the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND.

It was over fifteen years ago, in his preface to Yon Barna's scrupulous new biography, that Jay Leyda called for recognition of a 'new Eisenstein', one that we could now construct from the evidence of his multifarious projects and researches that reached far beyond the bare canon of finished work. One reason why progress in this direction has been so slow is undoubtedly the lack of close, regular contact between western and Soviet scholars. For the sheer quality and audacity of Soviet critical work on Eisenstein over the last quarter-century should have served as an example and stimulus, had it been translated and discussed. Even now an article like Leonid Kozlov's 'A Hypothetical Dedication' (first published in 1970, translated in Kleberg and Lövgren's *Eisenstein Revisited*, Stockholm, 1987) can still

surprise with the boldness of its psychoanalytic hypothesis that Eisenstein portrayed his beloved and feared Meyerhold as Tsar Ivan.

On the rare occasions when a new Soviet publication has been rapidly translated, as when Kleiman's presentation of the 'Notes for a Film of Capital', first published in *Iskusstvo kino* in 1973, appeared in *October* in 1976 with an accompanying article by Annette Michelson, the response to even such a virtuoso piece dating from the height of Eisenstein's 'marxist modernism' appears to have been muted. Will the Seagull and BFI series meet the same re-



Eisenstein's grave.
Photo: Ian Christie.

fusal to keep pace with Eisenstein's thrusting intellect? Can Eisenstein still be rescued from his Edwardian image as the contemporary of Chaplin and Griffith and restored to the ranks of heroic modernists who looked further ahead than we have yet realised? Naum Kleiman told the story during his NFT lecture of discovering a file in the archive labelled 'pré-natal experience'. So the old man was losing his grip, he thought, putting it away. Not until years later did he realise that Eisenstein's interest in this theme had anticipated modern biological as well as psychoanalytic research. But, predictably, a recent review of the first volume of the BFI series declared that 'he was wrong about everything...'

An international conference at Keble College, Oxford in July, marking the opening of the Eisenstein exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, will provide the opportunity to consider how right he was about many things. And the exhibition itself should reveal a very different figure from the stereotype of casual history. Meanwhile Lunacharsky, presiding over TSGALI, would undoubtedly take the long view: he was quite certain in 1928 that 'for many years people will study Eisenstein's methods.'

Jay Leyda

The news of Jay Leyda's death came while this article was in preparation, and inevitably it cast a shadow over the discussion of Eisenstein's legacy. For it was due to Leyda, more than anyone, that Eisenstein's thought and teaching became internationally known at a time when, ironically, his reputation in the Soviet Union was at a low ebb. Seizing the opportunity offered by the wartime alliance, he found an American publisher for the four essays that comprise *The Film Sense*, which became Eisenstein's first book to be published anywhere.

Nor did Leyda's commitment to the cause of Eisenstein flag during the difficult postwar years. *Film Form*, which Eisenstein had approved before his death, followed in 1949; and *Film Essays* in 1968 included the first version of Leyda's monumental Eisenstein bibliography. Then in 1982, working with Eisenstein's sister-in-law, who had emigrated to the United States, he condensed a lifetime's collection of rare and stimulating material into *Eisenstein at Work*.

But if there is one work for which he will be longest remembered, this must be *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, first published in 1960 and since twice revised. For those of us who grew up with *Kino* to consult and inspire, it is difficult to grasp how little reliable information on Soviet cinema existed beforehand. *Kino* represented a

massive ground-breaking task, setting new standards in cinema history research, not least by carefully defining what had yet to be studied to his satisfaction. And Leyda was too scrupulous simply to patch new material on to later editions of *Kino*, unless he could base this on personal research.

First-hand experience was indeed crucial for him. He had not only studied with Eisenstein at VGIK in Moscow and gone on to work as an assistant on the ill-fated *Bezhin Meadow*—his superb location photographs of this production formed part of the exhibition held shortly before his death at New York University, where he was professor of Cinema Studies since 1974—but he had used his two years in the Soviet Union to see every film possible. He remains one of the very few cinema historians who have scrupulously noted which films they have actually seen and when.

Scrupulous, exact—but passionate in his enthusiasms: a staunch defender of Soviet cinema during its darkest hours, yet the last to accept any sentimental over-valuing of its achievements. Was it perhaps because he did not find that the post-Stalin, post-Thaw Soviet cinema measured up to his high standards that he turned to China (which was also the birthplace of his wife, the dancer and choreographer Si-lan Chen)? Or was it that he could not resist another mighty challenge? Astonishingly, his work at the Film

Bureau of the Chinese Ministry of Culture in 1959-60 bore fruit in another 'foundation' history, *Dianying (Electric Shadows)*, published in 1972.

Having learned from Jay Leyda's writings for twenty-five years, I met him only once, on what must have been his last visit to the Soviet Union, at the 1985 Moscow Film Festival. We arranged to talk late at night in my room in the murky labyrinth of the Rossia Hotel. Within minutes of arriving, he was recalling vividly the struggles to salvage and catalogue Eisenstein's surviving Mexican footage at the Museum of Modern Art; and how in 1953-4 he had compiled the 'Episodes for Study' to preserve as much as possible of Eisenstein's intentions. He spoke encouragingly of *The Film Factory*, the anthology on Soviet cinema that Richard Taylor and I were compiling (which had of course been referred to him by our American publishers). And he shared my newfound enthusiasm for Shukshin as a figure neglected in the Western appreciation of modern Soviet cinema. Then, too soon, he was gone.

His death in New York on 15 February, after a long illness, also came much too soon. Many of the ideals of scholarship and East-West co-operation that he cherished may yet take root in the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. But he will be with us constantly in spirit wherever Eisenstein is honoured and serious cinema history practised.

I. C.

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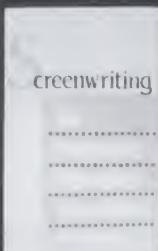
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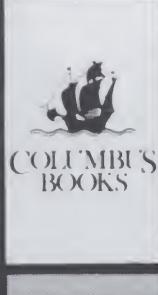


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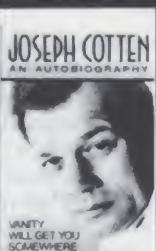
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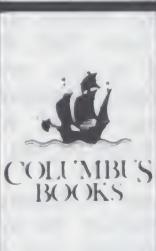
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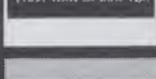
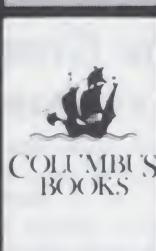


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The Great Juxtaposer

'It was quite late in my life before I discovered that the cinema was my trade or, at least, something I liked doing—a means of earning my living which could also be a means of expression. First I was an extra, then I became an assistant director and only then did I start to write films. But more often than not I patched up other people's scripts and rewrote screenplays because shooting was due to start in a fortnight... .'

It seems extraordinary that Jacques Prévert, author of some of the most moving and poetic films ever to be made in France (*Une Partie de campagne*, *Le Jour se Lève*, *Le Quai des Brumes*, *Les Visiteurs du Soir*), should have come to the cinema almost by accident. Yet the exhibition devoted to his life and work currently on show at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris makes it clear that the poet who wrote the incomparable dialogues of *Les Enfants du Paradis* was not first and foremost a man of the cinema. It would appear to be as much to Prévert as to Carné that we owe Arletty's appearance in the film, but the conception of the role of Garance, the juxtaposition of the sublime and the vulgar embodied in the contrast between her beauty and her accent and delivery, are quintessential Prévert and owe much to the circumstances in which his career developed.

Prévert, of course, occupies a very special place in French culture because he is a genuinely popular poet, a little like Desnos or Queneau but more universally liked than they. He achieved national fame with the publication of *Paroles* in 1945 and the secret of his success perhaps lies in an ironic outlook on life combined with an ear for popular speech. As one admirer put it, 'His inspiration comes from the streets rather than books and he despises right-thinking people.'

Some of Prévert's iconoclasm derived from his youthful friendships with members of the Surrealist group. He met Yves Tanguy and Marcel Duhamel while on military service and shared a house with them in Montparnasse for many years. Prévert was not a contributor to the Surrealist magazines but their influence can be seen in his love of the city and the surprises it can contain and his technique of bizarre juxtaposition. The exhibition contains a splendid series of photos of Prévert, as it were *in situ*, in the Café de Flore (because he frequented St Germain des Prés before the Existentialists), in the Cité Véron

and in the cabaret directed by his brother Pierre, La Fontaine des Quatre Saisons. If one had to choose one image of Prévert the Parisian it would show him sitting alone on a café terrace, slumped down in his chair, bowler hat on his head, fag-end in his mouth, dog at his feet and a half-empty glass of wine on the table, contemplating nothing in particular.

During the 1930s, however, Prévert's literary activities became distinctly more populist since he composed the texts for the performances of the agit-prop Groupe Octobre which between 1932 and 1935 offered a satiric commentary on current affairs. But perhaps the most fascinating section of the exhibition for understanding Prévert's films is the one devoted to his collages, the first of which, *Portrait de Janine* (his wife), dates from 1943. Before becoming involved in the cinema Prévert had briefly been employed in a newspaper cuttings office, which clearly developed his eye for the poignancy of the *fait divers*.

The marriage of disparate materials and subject matter, the systematic liking for incongruity are an important source of Prévert's films. Marcel Carné described how Prévert went to work writing *Jenny* (Carné's first film): 'His technique was to invent supporting roles which were extremely interesting and to juxtapose them with the principals who were not... and in that way to create an atmosphere of strangeness

which was in marked contrast to the light comedies set on the Côte d'Azur which were much in vogue at the time.' Prévert himself is on record as saying: 'What interests me are the actors and in Carné's films we always changed their roles around.' Hence Prévert's capacity to combine the real and the surreal and to render poetic the preoccupations of ordinary people which are the source of his charm.

This exhibition, organised by the Cinémathèque Française, is a companion piece to the one on Alexandre Trauner mounted a couple of years ago. But in the intervening period the Cinémathèque has acquired a new venue in the Palais de Tokyo, so-called from the Japanese Pavilion at the 1937 Exposition Universelle. Until the Pompidou Centre was opened, this building housed the Museum of Modern Art. Then it became the Museum of Photography and now it has been transformed into a centre of the audiovisual media containing not simply exhibition space and the Cinémathèque's collection of books and stills, the Museum of Photography, but also the classrooms and studios of what used to be the film school INHEC and has now become a school training students in all aspects of the audiovisual arts.

The idea is that the combination of functions should help to reconcile theory and practice, art and technology, in memory as they have so frequently been in practice. The oeuvre of someone such as Prévert is surely a superb illustration of how necessary it has become to cross such barriers, how it is only now that big centres such as Paris, or indeed London, are beginning to come to terms with the visual heritage of this century.

Jacques Prévert (right) with his brother Pierre.



Admiral Ruiz

Two hours away by train, however, and one might be worlds apart. The Maison de la Culture du Havre, flagship, as befits France's principal port, of André Malraux's policy of cultural expansion, sports a new set of buildings by Oscar Niemeyer. The outside looks as though it is inspired by the town's maritime vocation since it is a kind of gigantic concrete ship's funnel; the inside bears a strange resemblance to the National Theatre in London, at least in its colour scheme which marries mauve carpeting and bare concrete. The reason for such splendour is that Le Havre is a town run by the Communist Party, which believes in investing in the superstructure in the shape of the local football team and the Maison de la Culture.

Since the Chilean director Raul Ruiz took over as head of the Maison some three years ago, it has developed a significant film and video production programme, virtually the only one in provincial France. Alongside Ruiz's own films such as *La Chouette Aveugle* or *Bérénice*, Le Havre has financed works by Manoel de Oliveira, Jean Rouch, Philippe Grandrieux and, most recently, Steve Dwoskin who has just completed *Further and Particular*, co-produced by Channel 4 and Le Havre. Its premiere recently figured as part of a British Cinema season in which Frears and Greenaway especially pulled in the crowds.

Entente more cordiale

This all goes to show that British cinema is currently fashionable throughout France and not just in Paris. Back in the capital, however, the Cinémathèque is hosting a retrospective of British cinema, organised by the National Film Archive, even before it arrives in London. Richard Attenborough's inaugural address at the gala opening was mildly self-congratulatory in the 'British are coming' vein, but with some justification since *Cry Freedom* is a smash hit. The great critical difficulty the British cinema has apparently suffered in France is its lack of auteurs, 'cinéma de genres' in Rivette's scathing dismissal.

Two things have happened to overcome this apparent obstacle to critical respectability. On the one hand, it has finally acquired some identifiable auteurs. In this sense, Peter Greenaway is a hero whose path-breaking activities cannot be too



Ruiz on the quarterdeck at Le Havre. Photo: Ian Christie.



Opening of the National Film Archive season at the Cinémathèque. From left, Bryan Forbes, Sir Richard Attenborough, Jean Rouch, Jean Douchet.

warmly praised for their effect on the French perception of British cinema. On the other hand, the generation of critics who insisted on auteurism as a criterion of judgment has ceased to hold sway, so that the real strengths of the British cinema can become more apparent. Of course, there are some auteurs such as Hitchcock or Michael Powell, but the retrospective also pays homage to the British studios, to the traditions of documentary and realism and, most daring in a French context, to the literary inspiration of many British films.

A film a day for a year is a tall order, but there is every sign that the season is being well received. When it opened, two whole evenings on television were devoted to British

cinema with screenings of Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (the opening film) and discussions with the critics. The season is billed as an illustration of the campaign to save the national film heritage, but the interest it has aroused is indicative of the sudden realisation, in France, that the unification of the European market and the rapid transformation of broadcasting render collaboration with a country that actually makes films in the English language more and more desirable. Paradoxically, British cinema, which has always been taxed by its indigenous detractors for parochialism, may be the agent which shows the French that they, too, have been parochial.

JILL FORBES

ESTERERS



Red-Roofed House, by Euthana Mukdasanit.

f

According to the region's United Nations commission, by the end of the century thirteen of the world's largest urban centres will be in the Asia-Pacific area. To which the man in the Shanghai/Bangkok/Manila traffic jam can only answer: what makes them think it will take that long? The major cities of South-East Asia are already changing and developing at a speed to enervate the average western visitor in minutes. In the years since the Second World War, both Tokyo and Hong Kong have proved that 19th-century village communities can mutate into awesome 21st-century cities without imposing unmanageable strains on their ever-swelling populations and without suffering undue loss of character. The region's other capitals, from Seoul to Jakarta, are in the throes of the same mutation, and most of them seem to be taking to the post-modern world with the same facility. As the globe's economic axis shifts east, these are the cities poised to take centre stage.

Bangkok and Manila are prime examples. They are curiously similar cities, despite the obvious cultural differences. Thailand has never been colonised, maintains an extensive (and apparently much-loved) constitutional

TONY RAYNS visits two embattled centres of film production: Bangkok and Manila

monarchy, and is an overwhelmingly Buddhist country. The Philippines were colonised for more than 350 years by the Spanish, the Americans and the Japanese, have no stable constitutional base of any kind, and are now (thanks to the Spanish) Asia's only predominantly Catholic nation. Differences become apparent when you venture into the countryside, but place the capital cities side by side and you have the next thing to a rhyming couplet. By very different roads, they have reached almost exactly the same stage of development. They have the same housing and urban renewal problems, the same opportunities and poverty-traps, the same visible wealth, the same street-life, the same sense of the future as a page on which *anything* might be written. And they both have film industries on the verge of collapse.

The West has never given much thought to Thai or Filipino film.

Neither had most Thais or Filipinos until quite recently. The notion that popular cinema of the past might have value has been slow to reach South-East Asia. It has taken root more readily in the Philippines, where English is a lingua franca and the right books have been imported; fluent second languages are still a rarity in Thailand. Anyhow, the realisation comes too late to save the vast bulk of old movies that have already been lost.

Today, just as a new generation of film-literate directors and critics comes into its own, the film industries of Thailand and the Philippines are facing the same crisis as their European cousins, only worse. The mass audience, once among the most faithful in the world, now stays away more often than it comes, and cheap rental videotapes (often pirated) are available from every second doorway on the street. There are no easy solutions in sight. Production costs—already incredibly low by western standards—have been slashed, star salaries and publicity budgets have been boosted, the old picture palaces are being replaced with smaller and more comfortable cinemas, but none of it seems much help. What options exist for film-makers ambitious to do 'serious' work? Their best hope is to follow the

example of someone like Oshima in Japan: to build up overseas markets for their films until they reach the point when foreign investment is forthcoming. A very few directors have already taken small steps in that direction. But for a strategy like that to work, we in the West will have to show a lot more interest than we have so far.

B · A · N · G · K · O · K

Of all the unwritten chapters in film history, the one on Thai cinema may well be the most fascinating. The man writing it is Dome Sukvong, Thailand's budding Langlois, who has lobbied the government so long and so hard that it has finally tried to keep him quiet by giving him the former Royal Mint as a base for his National Film Archive project. Its munificence unfortunately didn't extend to paying the running costs, and so Dome and a small group of loyal friends are living hand-to-mouth as they struggle to catalogue a collection of old newsreel material donated by the TV stations. But at least they now have some air-conditioned and humidity-controlled vaults for the storage of their prints. They also have the nucleus of a feature-film collection, but fiction has to come second to documentary for the moment. Bureaucrats, Dome tells me wryly, can be persuaded that news footage has historical importance, but it will take a lot more to convince them that the movies are worth preserving too.

The history he is struggling to retrieve is certainly unique, not to say bizarre. Thai film production (as distinct from films made by émigré Americans in Thailand) dates from 1927, and the first talkie was made in 1931. The production level has averaged 80 features a year since the end of the war, although it shot up to 200-plus for a time in the mid-1970s, when the government introduced a massive import tax on foreign movies. The MPAA, characteristically, responded with a boycott, and Thai entrepreneurs rushed to replace the missing American movies with locally made quickies. (The Americans have since decided to bite the bullet, and Hollywood is now back on Thai screens.) None of this seems remotely surprising until you learn that production took an unusual turn in 1940, when the success of a 16mm feature made for the Railways Department by the royal prince Sukarawannadit Diskul led all producers to drop 35mm and switch to 16mm. It was only the temporary disappearance of Hollywood films from the market that forced Thai producers to revert to 35mm.

Stranger yet, nearly all the hundreds of 16mm features made between the war years and the mid-1970s were shot and released *silent*. Each theatre had its own team of voice-artists to perform the scripted dialogue live at each showing, with a back-up of sound effects and recorded music. Thai movies were still being exhibited this way just over

fifteen years ago. Given the pace of change in the region, of course, 1970 already seems inexpressibly remote. One of the ways that Dome Sukvong raises funds for his archive is by mounting one-off screenings of silent movies with live sound. His (predominantly student) audiences, he tells me, find the shows quaint and exotic. He would probably put on such shows more often, except that the huge majority of silent movies must already be considered lost. It's not just that no producers thought it worth storing the prints, or that countless production companies have now vanished without trace. Thailand has an additional hazard that would induce raving paranoia in the stanchest western archivist: a species of insect that feeds on film stock.

There's another way that Thai cinema is out of phase with the international mainstream: it has carried the star system to an extreme unimagined even in the film industries of India. When the top male star Mitr Chai-bancha died in a helicopter accident in 1970, it was calculated that at the height of his popularity he had appeared in 80 per cent of all Thai films. Only a year later, the heir to Mitr's crown, Sombat Mathanee, crashed his Alf Romeo and spent some weeks in hospital; as a result, 28 films had to halt production, and another five had to postpone their start-dates. The star who has dominated the industry for most of the last fifteen years is Sorapong Chatri, a genial 39-year-old who is taking his recent drop in popularity philosophically. Sorapong told me that he was never paid for nearly one-third of the many films he appeared in at his peak: producers would literally beg him to sign contracts, use his name to raise advances from exhibitors, and then not pay him if the film failed to turn a profit. (Non-payment would not deter a producer from coming back with renewed pleas, either.) Despite the fact that he has been displaced by younger

stars like the singer Thongchai McIntyre, Sorapong is still so busy that he has to sleep most nights in his car as he dashes between locations for different films in simultaneous production.

These factors carry a share of the blame for the industry's present difficulties. The Thai public's insatiable appetite for reigning 'superstars' has shored up the entrenched and inflexible monopolies in distribution and exhibition. Majors like Pyramid and Saha-Mongkol have abandoned production but kept their distribution interests, and any independent producer who hopes to release his film through their circuits must follow their wishes to the letter. Needless to say, this arrangement leaves little room for innovation in casting, subject or treatment. And the peculiarities of Thai production—the comparatively recent return to talkies, the tyranny of the star system, memories of the boom years—have all tended to close producers' minds to alternative possibilities, so that the industry condemns itself to repeat itself endlessly. It runs on the spot, while the society it supposedly serves changes from hour to hour, minute to minute.

That said, it's a minor miracle that any films of international stature get made at all. But they do, and a handful of directors—some industry veterans, others newcomers—are determined that more will. Most of them are clustered round the two companies (the major Five Stars and the new mini-major Poonsaab Productions) that still consider it worthwhile to finance two or three 'prestige' films a year, thereby gently testing the limits of the industry's formulas and traditions.

The most eagerly awaited film of 1987 was *Ploy Talay* (*The Gem from the Deep*), the first in four years from Thai cinema's maverick independent, Cherd Songsri. Shot entirely on location in the South, it turned out to be an elegant period morality played out among the inhabitants of a fishing village. The plot

The Gem from the Deep, by Cherd Songsri.



is inescapably reminiscent of *The Pearl*: a large ruby found on the sea bed provokes outbreaks of love, lust, jealousy, crime and moral strength. But the source novel by Mai Muangderm was published in 1937, eight years before Steinbeck's novella, and the underlying philosophy anyway seems profoundly Buddhist. As melodrama, the film is too wordy and rather too restrained in its emotional paroxysms, but there is a lot to enjoy in its loving depiction of the milieu, its physicality and its humour. It also confirms that Cherd is the only Thai director who can make jobbing stars look plausible in village clothes. Still, the film is a little too obviously a compromise between auteurist impulses and the difficult demands of the market. It took much longer to make and cost very much more than most Thai features; it reportedly recovered its cost but generated little profit.

In a sense, Cherd is a prisoner of his own hard-won independence. His company Cherdchai has made 14 features since 1966, half on 35mm. (He actually spearheaded the turn away from 16mm in 1973, after attending a short course at UCLA film school.) His problem is that he made a minor masterpiece ten years ago. *Plae Kaow* (*The Scar*, also based on a Mai Muangderm novel) is one of the two finest Thai films I've seen, and an undoubtedly landmark in Asian cinema. It moves between an indelible evocation of traditional village life—with a deliciously sensual courtship carried out on the backs of water buffalo and under banyan trees—and an equally vivid reconstruction of Bangkok high society of the 1930s. It was an unprecedented success both at home and abroad; it was the first Thai film to win the Grand Prix at a festival in the West—at Nantes in 1981.

This success has inevitably overshadowed all Cherd's subsequent work. His follow-up film *Loed Supan* (*The Blood of Supan*, 1980) veered away in the completely different direction of epic spectacle—the story of a notorious 18th-century massacre of Thai villagers by the Burmese army, complete with elaborate split-screen effects—but failed to recoup its cost. That setback led him to retreat into a series of variations on the theme and imagery of *The Scar*, of which *The Gem from the Deep* is the latest. Understandably, he is now torn between a desire to recapture the magic of his greatest film and a reluctance to depart from the formula that conquered the Thai market.

The assistant director on *The Scar* was a (then) 26-year-old named Euthana Mukdasanit, now by far the most successful director of the younger generation in his own right. He works for the last surviving major, Five Stars Productions, whose roster also includes the distinguished veteran director Vichit Kounavudhi. Euthana is a charismatic and faintly enigmatic figure, an intellectual with a degree in Theatre Arts whose range stretches from docu-drama

to florid musical fantasy. Not the least of his surprises is a taste for the films of Peter Greenaway; he asked me to bring him a copy of the published screenplay for *A Zed and Two Noughts*. His first completed film was *Thephida Bar 21* (*The Angel of Bar 21*, 1978), obliquely derived from Sartre's *La P... respectueuse* and reputedly extraordinary. (It is already impossible to see it; the negative is safe, but there are no surviving prints.) Since then he has oscillated between commercial chores for the company and projects of his own choice. Like Oshima in Japan, he makes films that are consistently different in subject and angle of approach. The constant factor underpinning them all is his exceptional skill with actors, professional and otherwise.

His recent film *Langkha Daeng* (*Red-Roofed House*, the Thai euphemism for an insane asylum) is not destined for export, although it commands a certain respect for being one of the most im-

probable vehicles for a teenagers' idol ever devised. It's a social satire framed as comic fantasy, obviously indebted to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, but perhaps more to the Kesey novel than to the Forman film. It was the box-office champion of 1987, thanks largely to the popularity of its star, Thongchai McIntyre, a Eurasian singer of somewhat fragile charm. Euthana made it to offset the losses on his previous film, and so he raised no protest when the one sequence he was proud of—a 15-minute group encounter scene in which asylum inmates act out their traumas—was cut from the release prints because audiences didn't understand it.

Euthana's strong claim to international attention rests on two earlier films: *Nampoo* (*The Story of Nampoo*, 1984) and *Peesua lae Dokmai* (*Butterfly and Flowers*, 1985). Both are excellent, in quite different ways. *Nampoo* dramatises the real-life story of a teenage heroin addict from a broken

Below left: Euthana's *Butterfly and Flowers*.

Below right: (from left) Manop Udomdej, Cherd Songsri, Euthana Mukdasanit.



middle-class home, with an unsparing account of the symptoms of addiction and quasi-documentary sequences showing an attempted cure at the remarkable Tham Krabok Monastery in Saraburi Province. *Butterfly and Flowers* is adapted from a respected novel about Thailand's Muslim minority, but nothing could be less 'literary' than its grasp of the joys and terrors of a child forced into an adult role, or its flair for evanescent images, or the gymnastic agility of its camerawork.

The most innovative films I saw in Thailand—the ones closest to the western notion of 'alternative cinema'—came from the relatively young company Poonsaab Productions. Its founder-manager is Visit Mingwatana, a canny Thai-Chinese with an unerring ability to read social developments and find the right stories to reflect them. It's no accident that the most promising young directors have found their way to Poonsaab: the company offers them their best chance of making engaged films that can catch the interest of a public still overwhelmingly oriented towards escapism. A typical Poonsaab film takes a story from recent newspaper headlines and turns it into realist hyper-drama, rather in the way that Sam Fuller used to do. If film is a battleground, then Poonsaab productions are its light infantry.

Manop Udomdej's *Ya Pror Me Chu* (*The Accusation*, 1985) is a case in point. True to company form, it was based on a real-life scandal: an army officer sued his wife for divorce, citing adultery with five army privates, but she unexpectedly fought back in court and eventually succeeded in exposing her husband as an adulterous sadist with a record of venereal diseases the length of the Bangkok telephone directory. The film is basically an orthodox courtroom drama with a 'feminist' thrust designed to appeal to the female audience, but several elements make it

exceptional. One is its sexual frankness, extremely rare in any Asian film; another is the quality of its performances, including some from actors elsewhere capable of wild melodramatic excesses; and the most striking is the implicit critique of the relationship between the army and the civilian population. Manop's only previous film was the 'underground' political feature *Prachachon Nork* (*On the Fringe of Society*, 1981), a brave analysis of the ways that the Thai authorities have tried to justify their poor human and civil rights record by erecting a demon of Communist conspiracy. He spent three years trying to raise the budget for another 'underground' film on the child prostitution problem before turning in despair to Poonsaab, for whom he has recently completed a second film. He is hardly the first director to discover that popular genres can be turned to subversive ends, but he is certainly one of the very few in Asia.

A more recent Poonsaab film deals explicitly with the fall-out from the student-militant movement of the mid-1970s that produced a figure like Manop Udomdej. Pantaywanop Thewakul's *Chang Man, Chan Mai Care* (*Damn It, I Don't Care*, 1986) centres on a woman advertising executive and her protégé, a country-born gigolo who works as a stripper in a gay bar. She represents the disillusioned but self-hating middle-class generation of former radicals who have sold out; he represents the blameless, uneducated rural proletariat, who are grist to the mill of the urban sex industry. Godardian prostitution metaphors are tangled up in scenes of barnstorming melodrama, and the resulting mélange of politics, homosexuality, satire and sentimentality is enough to conjure Magnus Hirschfeld back to life. The film itself is one huge oxymoron: naive-sophisticated, schematic-anarchic. However hard it is to pin down or rationalise the film,

though, there is no question that it fully reflects the energy and excitement of the society in which it's set. It has precisely the capacity to invent its own idiom as it goes along that *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* aspires to but often misses. It would be an interesting film in any culture; in the South-East Asian context, it's phenomenal.

It strikes me as amazing that a film industry capable of producing such diverse and accomplished films as these has not yet attracted more attention in the West. One reason is that the Thai government levies a massive export tax on all film prints sent abroad, thereby unintentionally discouraging producers from taking part in festivals. Another is that the producers themselves, sceptical of their chances of making foreign sales, take few initiatives to make their films available. It's a sad and frustrating state of affairs. The one consolation is the thought that an industry boasting such disparate talents as Cherd Songsri and Euthana Mukdasanit, Manop Udomdej and Pantaywanop Thewakul is never going to shut up shop without a good fight.

M · A · N · I · L · A

In July 1986 the elderly lawyer Arturo Tolentino (the vice-presidential candidate in Marcos' fateful 'snap election' a few months earlier) staged an attempted presidential coup at the august Manila Hotel. Of all the many attempts to topple Corazon Aquino's 'People Power' government, this was doubtless the most flat-footed and absurd. It ended up as pure comic opera: the coup that reached for a nation but won only a hotel room from which room-service was withdrawn. Around the same time the American movie *Police Academy 3: Back in Training* opened in Manila. The ads in the press carried the legend: 'There is no truth to the rumour that the original cast is in or around the Manila Hotel!' Apart from cutting Tolentino and his toy soldiers down to size (and suggesting that someone in the Manila office of Warner Brothers deserved a raise), the ad neatly encapsulated the link between politics and show business in the Philippines. The bane of all serious attempts to reconstruct the nation after the depredations of the Marcos years is the perennial Filipino tendency to turn politics into *palabas*, the Tagalog word for 'putting on a show'.

It follows, unfortunately, that all attempts to give Filipino film a responsible political dimension meet strong resistance from the industry and its audiences. If it's not *palabas*, it's not box-office. The pattern was set by the two most provocative films made in the final years of the Marcos regime—Mike De Leon's *Sister Stella L.*, on a nun's growing involvement in the civil rights movement, and Lino Brocka's *Bayan Ko—Kapit sa Patilim*—both of which did disappointing business. No director has succeeded in making a film about the

Bottom left: Euthana's *Nampoo*. Below: Banchong Kosalwat's *Khamsing*.



events that brought Aquino to power in February 1986, or even a film that adequately reflects the contradictions and turmoil of the last two years. The one who came closest was Marilou Diaz-Abaya, who started shooting *Four Days in February* but had to stop when her producer ran out of money. (The film apparently centred on two friends in opposing camps, one an Aquino supporter, the other a Marcos loyalist.) Worse still, the industry has been so nervous about profits and prospects for the last two years that the country's foremost film-makers have hardly been able to direct at all.

Lino Brocka was out of action for much of 1986 because Mrs Aquino rewarded his many years of anti-Marcos activism by inviting him to join the committee to draft the new constitution. The position involved spending five days a week in discussions and making weekend field trips around the country to sound out local feelings. I met Brocka for dinner one evening and found him suffering from high blood-pressure—brought on, he said, by an entire day listening to speeches from the Catholic faction. The advent of the Aquino administration has, if anything, sharpened his criticisms of Filipino politics and focused his instinctive sympathy for the Communist rebels of the New People's Army. He later resigned from the Constitutional Commission in protest against its inclusion of economic clauses with an obvious pro-American bias, but not before he had successfully argued for the adoption of clauses guaranteeing freedom of speech and expression.

Freedom of expression, however, is not worth all it might be when one lacks access to the means of expression. Back in the real world, Brocka found himself without offers from the film industry; for several months he had to pay the rent by churning out weekly soap operas for TV. He wasn't able to direct a film again until the spring of 1987, and even then it was only *Maging Akin ka Lamang* (*You'll Just Be Mine*), a standard weepie based on a comic strip. Things have looked up a little since. He recently completed *Macho Dancer*, a more serious film about a teenage rent-boy, which he managed to trade off against a couple of orthodox melodramas for the same producer. Meanwhile his contemporary Ishmael Bernal suffered a similar hiatus in his career: a year of directing only for TV. He was able to resume work in the film industry only by agreeing to come up with an unnecessary sequel to his own earlier hit *Working Girls*. Sadly his revived career has now been halted again, this time by ill health. Other leading directors have opted out of the mainstream film industry altogether. Eddie Romero left the country to work on a historical epic in China, the fruit of a long struggle to set the project up as a co-production. And Mike De Leon, always something of a loner, took his name off a melodrama about rivalry

between brothers that he directed for a small independent company and has since been trying to set up a project on video; he also split from a TV commission to assemble a two-part documentary on the Marcos years.

As you might expect, the industry that is giving these directors such a hard time is in poor shape. The sector of the market that has survived the boom in pirate videotapes is swamped with imported action and horror movies, mostly from the USA and Hong Kong. Faced with this glut and a nationwide drop in cinemagoing, the domestic industry has inevitably retrenched. It is an industry almost entirely controlled by Filipino-Chinese, few of them known for altruistic patronage of the arts. There are now three major companies—Regal, Seiko and Viva—and there is a rapid turnover of small independent companies on the sidelines. Production is effectively limited to a handful of genres: macho action adventures, sentimental melodramas, teenage love stories, comedies geared to children and sex films.

The sex film genre gave the industry its last taste of real prosperity in 1986. Ironically, it was the Marcos regime that paved the way by cynically authorising the screening of uncensored Filipino movies at the Manila Film Centre, the notorious white elephant jerry-built on Manila Bay as the venue for Imelda Marcos' short-lived film festival. Films like Celso Ad. Castillo's *Virgin People* and Peque Gallaga's *Scorpio Nights* benefited from this waiving of censorship and drew enormous crowds to the normally derelict building. Before long, dozens of Filipino films were sporting close-ups of erections and the like, and the ousting of Marcos' censorship board in February 1986 led to a brief period when such images could be found on Filipino screens almost anywhere. Normal controls were quickly restored in Manila (it took longer in the pro-

Lino Brocka.



vinces) and the distribution of hardcore material reverted to under-the-counter video. During its short flowering, though, the genre threw up some startlingly strange films. The weirdest I saw was Elwood Perez' *Silip*, a ludicrous melodrama in which a demonic phallus (parted from its owner in a truly convulsive climax) finally drives two rival sisters into an act of lesbian incest. Really. The Filipino term for movies like this is 'bold', which seems somehow inadequate.

Now that its pornographic current is back to regulated decorum, the industry lacks both momentum and profits, despite the public's undiluted demand for escapism. The only real sign of life that I found in Filipino cinema was not in the industry at all, but in the explosion of independent film-making on Super-8 and 16mm that has come from nowhere in the last three years. Invited to give a talk at the Mowelfund Film Institute in Quezon City, I found that its administrators Rolfie Velasco and Surf Reyes have turned the place into a kind of workshop for young film-makers, most of them graduates from art colleges. The samples of their work that I viewed regrettably couldn't include anything by the movement's highly vocal leader Nick Deocampo, who has already

Below: Nick Deocampo. Bottom: Raymond Red.



published a useful book (*Short Film: Emergence of a New Philippine Cinema*, CFA Publications, 1985) on the origins and achievements of the group. But I did see films from eight other young independents, and was amazed by their range and technical quality. There was no more sign of politics than there is in the industry mainstream, but there was everything else from sophisticated animation (*The Criminal* by Emmanuel Dadivas and Fruto Corre, *The Great*

Below: Raymond Red's Pelikula.

Centre: Emmanuel Dadivas' The Criminal.

Bottom: Raymond Red's Kamada (Kind).

Smoke by Roque Lee) to offbeat mixtures of realist drama with special effects (Joey Agbayani's *Eye in the Sky*, Patrick Purugganan's *Boob Tube Bum*).

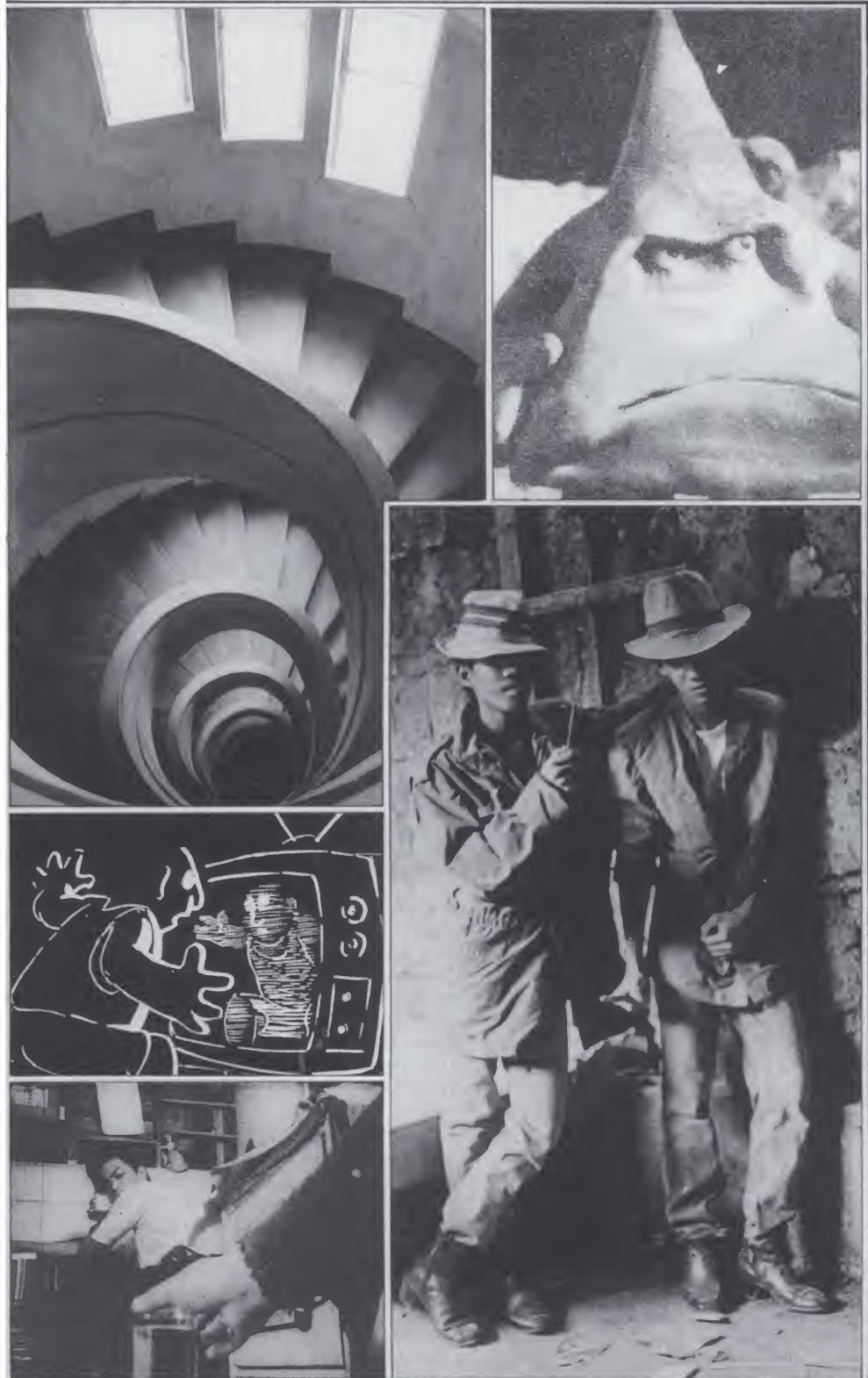
The most remarkable films I saw at Mowelfund were shorts by the (then) 21-year-old Raymond Red, who must be one of the most talented directors of his generation anywhere in the world. His films are generally fantasies, anchored strongly in material realities that are distinctively Filipino. They have two

starting points: autobiographical experience transmuted into fiction, and nostalgia for a remembered or imagined past, most often the 1950s. All of them are realised with great technical skill and composed of images of astonishing originality and resonance. Red has an uncanny ability to reveal Borgesian labyrinths within the most apparently mundane images and events.

Ang Hikab (The Yawn) is a kind of fable about an insomniac and a deep sleeper, set entirely on and around a bunk-bed in a bare room. First the peeling wall in the background becomes a screen on which objects appear, perhaps representing the thoughts of one sleeper (or both?); then the bunk-bed is suddenly transposed to the open countryside, where thoughts echo to the horizon and back. These visuals are accompanied by intricately layered sound on the track. *Kamada (Kind*, co-directed with Ian Victoriano) is a seemingly naturalistic narrative about a 1950s music student renting what he thinks will be a quiet room for his practice, but finding the room already occupied by a dying man. It turns out to be a film of quiet dread, in which every interstice comes to connote the horrors of human cruelty and neglect. *Kabaka (Enemy*, again co-directed with Victoriano) is an extended metaphor for the disappointments that accompany the transition from adolescence to adulthood, cast as a science-fiction parable. It imagines a mythology in which young men are trained to be guardians of the eastern skies and destined to be confronted by a mysterious enemy who threatens to steal the stars in a blaze of searing white light. The film is largely set in a tumbledown mountain shack, a space as meticulously designed and pregnant with associations as the stage directions for one of Beckett's 'dramaticules'.

Raymond Red has taken his films to festivals from Edinburgh to Tokyo, and the international exposure has helped him find the money to move from Super-8 to 16mm. It's clear that he will be able to go on making films, probably for a growing international audience, and it's possible that others from the same independent film-making movement will make a similar transition. What is unlikely, however, is that these young directors will ever find—or even look for—places in the mainstream of the film industry. They represent, precisely, an alternative approach to cinema, of a kind that doesn't now exist in Thailand or in most other Asian countries. Given the current tendencies in the industry, it may well be that Raymond Red will stand for Philippines cinema in the 1990s in the same way that Lino Brocka has done in the 1980s.

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Blacklist

RICHARD TRAINOR



Woody Allen in *The Front*.

'We are a people who do not want to keep much of the past in our heads. It is considered unhealthy in America to remember mistakes, neurotic to think about them, psychotic to dwell upon them.' So wrote Lillian Hellman in *Scoundrel Time*, her looking-glass memoir of the Hollywood blacklist period.

For forty years, Lillian Hellman's assessment has proved the rule as far as cinema is concerned. With the exception of Martin Ritt's *The Front* (1976), there have been hardly any films dealing with the dark ages of American crypto-fascism in the late 1940s and early 50s. Lately, however, Hollywood seems to have decided that the blacklist years should finally be given their due, and three new films are prepared to tackle the subject.

The first, *The House on Carroll Street*, has already opened in the United States

and will be released in Britain during the summer. Starring Kelly McGillis, Jeff Daniels and Mandy Patinkin and directed by Peter Yates, it has to do with a *Life* magazine photo editor (Kelly McGillis) whose career is threatened by her stand for civil liberties during the McCarthy era. With a screenplay by the once blacklisted writer Walter Bernstein (*His Kind of Woman*, *Fail Safe*, *The Front*), *Carroll Street* has impeccable left-wing credentials, if not so far excellent reviews. Most American critics have found it uneven and disappointingly tame.

Season of Fear could be the most promising project of the three. Semi-autobiographical and based on the experiences of the blacklisted writer-director Abraham Polonsky (*Body and Soul*, *Force of Evil*, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*), *Season of Fear* will focus its attention on the House Un-American

Activities Committee, whose 1947 hearings gave birth to the Hollywood blacklist and, incidentally, to the political career of Richard Nixon, then a freshman Congressman. 'This film will deal with the entire political issue,' Abraham Polonsky promises. 'The others I've heard about, like *Carroll Street*, raise the question and avoid the subject.'

The protagonist of *Season of Fear* is a film director summoned to testify before HUAC, facing the dilemma of whether or not to take the protection of the Fifth Amendment and invoke his right not to incriminate himself. The US Supreme Court upheld HUAC's right to demand an answer to its fateful question: 'Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?' Taking the Fifth became the only defence that witnesses of conscience could present. Even so, this action earned those who took it

the tag of 'Fifth Amendment Communists'. As Stefan Kantner wrote in *A Journal of the Plague Years*, it was a time when, 'The accused was guilty until innocence had been clearly established. The accuser was the judge, the past was present, decency was evil.'

Irwin Winkler (*Rocky* and *Raging Bull*) will produce *Season of Fear* and Bertrand Tavernier will direct. 'Bertrand and I began talking about it when we did *'Round Midnight*', Winkler said. 'Bertrand has been interested in the blacklisted writers and directors for a long time—in fact, ever since he worked as press agent for Joseph Losey.' *Season of Fear* is on hold at the time of writing because of the screenwriters' strike, but Winkler hopes to get the production under way later in the year.

Director Richard Brooks (*The Blackboard Jungle*, *In Cold Blood*, *Looking for Mr Goodbar*) is also expected to enter the blacklist stakes. Brooks, whose film will examine the direct effects of blacklisting in Hollywood, says that he was given encouragement by David Putnam during the latter's reign at Columbia. The as yet untitled 'DeMille project' concerns Cecil B. DeMille's attempt to overturn what he regarded as the radical stewardship of the Directors' Guild under Joseph Mankiewicz. 'The main thrust of the film covers the three-day period when DeMille sent out telegrams to his loyal followers asking them to oust Mankiewicz,' says Brooks, 'and how I and twenty-four other directors tried to get a membership meeting together to prevent this from happening.' David Putnam's departure from Columbia last autumn meant that this project was also put on hold, and Brooks is uncertain of the present management's attitude. 'When this new lady [Dawn Steel] came in, I don't even think she knew anything about it.' But the project still interests David Putnam: 'He told me, hold on, we'll get to it.'

It is not very surprising that it has taken Hollywood so long to come to terms with the blacklist: it was, beyond question, the most shameful and extended episode in the industry's history. Through the 1947 and 1951 hearings, actors such as John Garfield, José Ferrer and Sterling Hayden, producers such as Doré Schary and Adrian Scott, directors such as Elia Kazan and Edward Dmytryk, and writers—the main focus of HUAC's attention—such as Polonsky, Bernstein, Dalton Trumbo, Carl Foreman, were forced to submit to examinations on their Americanness from Congressmen and investigators. The hearings and the subsequent fifteen years fallout of paranoia split the ranks of the film community. Those 'friendly' to HUAC kept their jobs and aided the committee or one of the many 'watchdog' groups set up to monitor 'Americanness' in films by naming names and reporting suspicions. On the other side were old-line leftists, liberals, radicals and outright Communists, some of whom were included in the original Unfriendly Nineteen and the

later Hollywood Ten. Libertarians such as Humphrey Bogart, John Huston, Richard Brooks and Billy Wilder tried unsuccessfully to occupy the high middle ground of constitutional rights and privileges. Joseph Losey, Jules Dassin and others moved to Europe and established new careers; many blacklisted writers went on working under 'front' names; and Elia Kazan, Clifford Odets and Edward Dmytryk were among the more celebrated of those who named names, Dmytryk after serving his sentence as one of the Hollywood Ten. After giving his testimony to HUAC, Kazan called his old friend, the playwright Arthur Miller. 'Hi, it's Gadge,' said Kazan, using his nickname. 'I don't know any Gadge,' said Miller, and hung up.

Stories such as the Kazan-Miller falling out (thinly fictionalised in Miller's *After the Fall*), along with the circus-like atmosphere of the hearings and the histories of men like HUAC chairman J. Parnell Thomas, who shortly after his moment in the spotlight was convicted of padding his congressional expense account and sent to the same prison where two of the Hollywood Ten were doing time, show that Hollywood's refusal to touch the blacklist subject had nothing to do with shortage of drama. While *The Front* did get made, it was as a black comedy and then only because it featured Woody Allen and was, according to Martin Ritt, part of his own price

Kelly McGillis in
The House on Carroll Street.



for going to work for Columbia. And *The Front* was not a great box-office success. 'It did pretty well in Europe but only fair in the United States,' says Ritt. 'And when I took it around and showed it at the colleges, the kids didn't believe it. "Come on, Mr Ritt," they would say, "this didn't really happen".'

Ritt, Polonsky, Brooks and Winkler all say they have heard the argument that the blacklist years are not box-office. 'It's not a subject that promises great grosses, and that's what interests Hollywood more than anything,' according to Ritt. Polonsky's view is that, 'We have been living in a Cold War period, which the blacklist is a creature of.' And Brooks talks about Hollywood attitudes: 'This town is divided about three ways on the issue: one-third don't know, one-third don't care, and one-third profess to be interested but aren't really.' Probably just as relevant is Hollywood's own hand in the witch hunt, the way that the industry, still timorous after the Hays reign which saw the institution of the Production Code, quickly caved into paranoia and began insisting on its own measures to weed out 'reds', 'pinks', 'dopes' and 'fellow travellers'. Loyalty codes, blacklisting (the euphemisms 'too tall' or 'too short' were the standard forms of rejection for actors) and a pervasive atmosphere of fear were the order of the day. As Brooks says, 'They tried to prevent us having a membership meeting [of the Directors' Guild]; just a membership meeting. That is how frightening the times were.'

Why the sudden interest now? Polonsky thinks that the proliferation of doctoral dissertations on the subject may have something to do with it. Also: 'It [the blacklist] is old enough now that the worms can come out from under the rocks.' Brooks sees the 'climate now as more receptive.' Irwin Winkler tends to agree: 'With the political climate in America today, all bets are off. All the taboos have gone by the board.' But Martin Ritt suggests that simple bottom-line philosophy is the main factor: 'Every studio is trying to produce last year's big hit, and if you can make a serious blacklist film that manages to convey that we were wrong, treat it fairly, and get lucky and have a big hit, then other films like it will follow.'

Many of the most prominent players in the blacklist drama are now dead: Dalton Trumbo, Alvah Bessie, Albert Maltz, Joseph Losey, Hellman and Hammett. Most people, as Martin Ritt says, 'Don't even know what the blacklist was about; they've never heard of it.' But among those still alive, memory persists and feelings linger. Richard Brooks recalls attending a tribute to Kurosawa in Los Angeles last year and seeing a familiar face across the room. Brooks walked over to meet him. 'I'm Eddie Dmytryk,' announced the man who salvaged his career as a director by naming names for HUAC. Dmytryk shuffled a bit until Brooks took his outstretched hand. Then he smiled thinly and said, 'I guess it's OK now to say hello.'

STEPHEN BOTTO MORE

SHOTS • IN THE • DARK

THE REAL ORIGINS • OF FILM EDITING •

'In any study of the development of film technique, the lesson to be learned, I think, is not to neglect the actuality film in favour of the fiction film.'—John Barnes, *The Rise of the Cinema in Great Britain*

From the earliest days, both filmmakers and theorists have recognised the central role of editing in the art of the film. But how exactly did the editing process originate? And when? Over the years, there have been many attempts to answer these questions. It has been said that one or other film pioneer, such as James Williamson or Edwin Porter, 'invented' editing, some time between 1900 and 1903. I would argue, however, that much of the work had already been done in the first five years of the cinema's existence, before Williamson and Porter made their famous films. Like many early innovations both in film technique and equipment design, editing, the joining together of sections

of film to recreate space and time, originated less with drama than with the actuality films of real events.

The first films to be shown in 1895 were single shots, rarely longer than a minute, recording scenes of everyday life. It has been said that the Lumière set up their cameras and 'went on shooting until the stock ran out' (Karel Reisz). But more care was involved than this would imply. Marshall Deutelbaum has observed that the Lumière single shot actualities were not simply 'unadjusted, unarranged, untampered reality' but that 'each presents a process... in such a way that the beginning of the film coincides with the beginning of the process.' As early as 1897, Cecil Hepworth had an assistant to act as time-keeper, keeping an eye on the events before the camera to see 'that they finish before all the film is used up.' Such standards were considered important, so that from the very first films there was often a kind of 'editing' implicit in the process of shooting.

In the earliest period, projector design

did not allow for films to be joined together without the risk of tearing (this had to wait until autumn 1896, when apparatus with a small loop of film between the intermittent and the heavy reels was introduced by several manufacturers). In the Lumière shows, films were shown singly, and there was a considerable wait while each was laced up. 'A picture lasting 45 seconds, succeeded by a wait of about two minutes, robs shows of this kind of much of the pleasure they would otherwise afford,' noted the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* (June 1897).

Some showmen projected lantern slides to fill the gaps, and shows combining films with slides soon became longer and more complex. Indeed, cinema was often seen as an extension of the lantern, and 'cinematographic slides' was a common term for films. Hepworth suggested using slides and film and 'stringing the pictures together into little sets or episodes', using an 'argument' or 'plot' in the commentary to make it hang together. (As in the lantern era proper, a running commentary read by the showman was the norm.) From 1897, at the Eden Musée in New York, long series of images were put together by the exhibitor, including a 'Panorama' during the Spanish American War of 20 or more films together with lantern slides. And an even more ambitious show was assembled in Australia in 1900. *Soldiers of the Cross* has been quoted as the first feature film ever made—at the stupendous length of two and a quarter hours. In fact, it only had 13 short films: the bulk was made up of 200 slides shown with music and commentary.

Long before this, however, the new projection equipment had allowed exhibitors to join the minute-long films together, splicing twelve or more on to a single large reel. Often they were not joined directly: a small length of blank film of 6 to 18 inches was inserted between each view, giving about a second of black between shots. The main reason for this was that cutting directly from one shot to another was thought to be visually disruptive. Indeed, Hepworth continued to include blank film between shots in every film he made up to the First World War, and even in his 1951 autobiography still maintained that it 'avoided the harsh, unpleasant "jerk" usually associated with change of scene.' As late as 1918, in *How Motion Pictures Are Made*, Homer Croy observed that shot transitions 'without warning and without intermediate change' meant that 'the eye suffered a shock.'

Despite this, there were early efforts at making multi-shot films. By 1897, complete boxing match films were being exhibited, lasting over an hour, as well as a 13-scene version of the *Life and*



'Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee' (G.B. 1897): Editing in the camera. 1. The cameraman decides he has had enough of horses. He stops the camera—note the overexposed frames—and restarts on the passing gun-carriage. 2. The cameraman stops shooting during a lull in the procession, moves closer and restarts as more horses pass.

The first genuine steps towards 'continuity editing', it seems to me, came from quite another direction. Most film historians maintain that there is no true editing before 1900, since in all multi-shot films made before that date each shot represents a different scene taking place at a different time or in a different place. But while this is true for dramas of the Méliès type, it is not true for non-fiction. Here, series of disparate shots were soon giving way to series of shots of one event, such as a procession or a horserace. At first, shots were listed in the company catalogues with no suggestions about combining them. But by 1897 hints were being given to purchasers that they should buy several views of one event. The Warwick Trading Company's 1897-98 catalogue says of three views of a Madrid procession that they 'should be joined in the above order.' Or, about 11 views of a bullfight: 'When joined and shown consecutively as here arranged, [they] constitute a thrilling exhibition of 10 minutes duration.' Note that this is not just a case of separate films being shown together, as in the 'programmes' of films and slides. Here, rather, we have several shots covering one time period and adjacent spaces:

After the 1897 Jubilee of Queen Victoria, several firms offered films of the procession passing through London, taken from different points along the route. Such films were offered for sale with the recommendation that they be joined 'in the above order and shown consecutively'. And in terms of editing, these combinations are a significant development, predating similar techniques in the drama. *Stop Thief!*, for instance, was made in late 1901 by James Williamson—the story of a tramp stealing some meat and being chased by the butcher. In three shots we see the protagonists come towards and then past the camera before cutting to the next shot. This style of editing was to become characteristic of the chase films, of which *Stop Thief!* was the first. Yet a very similar kind of cutting is seen in views of processions, with the procession coming towards and past the camera—just the direction of movement that chase films always employed—followed by a cut. The chase film cut from shot to shot to follow characters running; with real events, shots covering happenings over an extended space could be joined to follow the procession's

Passion of Jesus Christ (Lumière). A year later, two- and three-shot films were coming from Georges Méliès' studio, and in 1899 the 20-shot *Cendrillon*.

So was Méliès a pioneer of film editing, as some historians have recently claimed? He certainly helped to establish the acceptability of longer films, and the idea that shots could be joined together. Ultimately, however, the technique of the magician/film-maker derives from the theatre: his multi-scene films are merely multi-scene theatre that has been filmed. Almost every shot is taken from the front, reproducing the

viewpoint of someone in the theatre audience, and one shot is normally one scene. Méliès' films, indeed, were often sold as separate shots (which gave purchasers the option of buying only some scenes) and he and others frequently used the lantern technique of dissolving rather than cutting, partly to reduce the possible disruption between shots. In these early multi-shot drama films there seems to be what Tom Gunning has called a 'non-continuous style', a desire to emphasise the junctions between rather than the action across cuts.

progress. So this kind of editing was already under way by the time the chase film came along and needed a similar treatment some four years later.

Another key example comes from a genre that had been popular since the lantern days: the fire brigade rescue. At the Grand Café in Paris, a series of four Lumière films was shown from January 1896 ('Departure of Fire Engine', 'Getting Ready', 'Playing on a Fire', 'Life Saving'). The films showed Lyons firemen at work, and the fire was apparently set up. Despite being sold separately, the films clearly made up an edited sequence, as did a similar sequence of four films advertised in 1897 by the Warwick Trading Company in Britain (*The Big Fire*: 'The Alarm', 'The Run to the Fire', 'Arriving at the Scene of the Action', 'The Rescue from a Burning Building'). It is interesting that, unlike the Lumière films, these do not have consecutive catalogue numbers and clearly represent an effort by the company to create a sequence out of existing shots. Thus the distributor/manufacturer is starting to take over the exhibitor's creative role.

Again, these sequences make an interesting comparison with Williamson's work. His *Fire*, made in late 1901, is

considered a landmark of editing. It consists of five shots: 1. A policeman finds a building on fire. 2. He comes to the fire station and the engine races out. 3. In a street the engine speeds past the camera. 4. A fireman enters a burning building and carries out a fainting man. 5. Outside, the man is brought down a ladder and other rescues follow. In editing terms, there is an obvious parallel with what the actualities were starting to do, as action is followed logically from one shot to another. The real advance was that *Fire* used these techniques in an *acted* film (and included an interior scene), with the actor going from shot to shot providing an additional element of continuity.

Barry Salt believes that Williamson's films were the originators of 'action continuity through shots cut directly together' and that 'so far no other films repeating the continuous shot-to-shot movement of Williamson's films are known before early 1903.' But there are the beginnings of a similar kind of shot-to-shot continuity in the procession and fire films I have described, when we see, for instance, a fire engine coming towards and past the camera and cut to the next shot of the arrival at the fire.

One reason that these films have been

ignored by historians, no doubt, is that the shots were not sold ready joined. It was only suggested that they be shown as a sequence, though by May 1901 the *Showman* listed a 22-shot documentary with the proviso, 'These pictures are not sold separately'. Yet there were multi-shot actualities sold as single films in the earliest period, and the innovators here seem to have been not the distributors or the exhibitors, but the cameramen.

In his 1897 book, *The ABC of the Cinematograph*, Cecil Hepworth makes a useful distinction between filming 'the known and the unknown'. The former meant events specifically set up for the camera—men building a wall, a game of cards—which the film-maker could control. With 'the unknown'—public occasions, sporting events—one didn't know what would happen, and it was this factor that dictated some form of editing. One could simply show the whole event, and this was sometimes done. It was unusual, however, and as a rule such long films were sold in minute-long sections. A better way was needed to summarise the events on film.

Hepworth suggested this method to news cameramen: 'However promising the beginning may be, long before the end all interesting incident may have given out. In which case, perhaps the best thing to do is to at once leave off turning, without moving the instrument, and resume turning when suitable incidents recur.' This would lead to what is called a jump-cut.

It was a remarkably common technique, and one can see such cuts in many surviving actualities. There is sometimes a slightly overexposed frame between the two 'shots' where the camera was stopped (which distinguishes a stoppage from an original splice, or later print damage). 'Train Coming into a Station' (Smith, 1896) shows a train coming towards us and going straight past. There is a camera stoppage, then another train is seen going away. The stoppage is clearly to get rid of the otherwise empty time between the two trains. The same effect was sometimes improved by an actual splice; the event was filmed and part was later excised. Such jump-cutting was also used by Méliès, to create his magical changes and disappearances. But where he used the technique to reproduce theatrical tricks, for actuality cameramen it was a first step towards better representing the real world on screen.



'Dewsbury Fire Brigade' (G.B., c. 1900): The fire engine has just left the shot and the crowd starts after it; cut to another shot with the engine again coming towards and past us; the crowd closes, cut to the brigade at the fire.



'Salvaging a Steamroller' (G.B., c. 1900) shows ten different views of the event, joined by splices or the tell-tale flash frames indicating a camera stoppage.

use before the turn of the century.

In 'Arrest in Chinatown, San Francisco' (Edison, 1897), there are two shots showing a Chinese being brought towards camera and then we cut to see him driven away in the paddy wagon. Clearly, the cameraman has filmed the first part of the action and then swivelled his camera as it moved away. But there were more sophisticated examples. 'The Early Morning Attack' (Edison, 1899) was in four shots, showing a company of US troops advancing up a hill against an enemy. Here we have a reverse angle on the action in shot two. Interestingly, this film was not an actuality but a reconstruction, which nevertheless borrowed the more sophisticated techniques that were being used on real events.

The history books say that the first film to divide a scene up into separate shots was G. A. Smith's *Grandma's Reading Glass* (September 1900), in which various objects a little boy examines with a magnifying glass in an establishing shot are cut in as point of view close-ups. This idea, using the cut-ins as a kind of 'stunt', seems to have been taken from a lantern original.* The first genuine cutting within a scene had to wait until 1901 or 1902.

Yet in actualities, even before this date, we find some use of intra-scene cutting. 'Shoot the Chutes' (Edison, 1899), for instance, consisted of three shots of an amusement park ride: 1. Looking across the bottom of the slide. 2. From the top, watching people sliding down. 3. Point of view sliding into the water. Here the cameraman has obviously filmed the most interesting views to give us a better idea of the ride than we could get from a single shot. The difficulties of filming the real world dictated some kind of editing. When Warwick filmed an inaccessible waterfall in 1901, it was 'an impossibility to portray the entire falls in one picture', so they used four shots, including a cut into a close-up. And even where one shot could have encompassed the whole action, actuality film-makers soon started using several. Only months after *Grandma's Reading Glass*, a Warwick film of a factory chimney

Once this editing of real time was achieved, the division of real space into shots followed as cameramen moved about to get the best view of the action. Warwick's coverage of the Sheffield-Derby football match of 1899, for instance, consisted of five shots: Entering field; midfield play; Sheffield gets a corner; Derby's only goal; players leaving field. Here the cameraman has left off turning at moments of little interest and has also moved and/or panned his camera between sections to achieve multi-shot coverage of the space. A similar technique was used in 'Salvaging a Steamroller' (GB, c 1900) in which the cameraman stops his camera (about 10 times) to move to a better position to continue filming. And in 'Admiral Dewey at State House, Boston' (Edison, 1899), a combination of jump-cuts and

four changes of camera position was needed. Such camera mobility through necessity was there from the earliest days: Birt Acres in 1896 had a horse-race series with up to five shots, showing different aspects of one race.

It was the same inflexibility of real events that led to another innovation in actuality filming. The first use of a reverse angle—the camera changing its view of a scene by at least 90 degrees—is usually said to have been in 'Ladies' Skirts Nailed to a Fence' (GB, 1900). Yet the cut here is not a genuine reverse angle but a Méliès-style cheat: the camera hasn't moved, but the fence is turned around to show the actors on the other side nailing the skirts. We must wait another three years to see the genuine article in drama, yet in actualities primitive reverse angles were in

* Lantern shows could be surprisingly innovative in editing: as well as cutting in to close-ups and from exteriors to interiors, there were reverse angles ('here we have another view—only looking in the opposite direction': Mason, 1889) and point of view cutting, as a slide of a traveller is intercut with views of the countryside. Alexander Black even used a form of crosscutting.

being razed started with a 'close view' of the props ablaze, cutting out to a distance shot of the whole chimney and then to another view to see it collapse.

It is apparent that by this time the makers of actualities were learning some key lessons about film-making. One of the most basic was that you don't need to show everything that has been filmed. Hepworth's advertisement in the *Showman* in February 1901 announced: 'Kindly note there is no "padding" to these pictures. We only publish 500 ft, though over 2,000 ft of film are exposed, for all the



'Taking President McKinley's Body from Train at Canton, Ohio' (Edison, 1901): There are three editing innovations in this 5-shot, 30-second film. 1. Between shots 1 and 2 (general view of the cortege) is a 'cutaway' of the bunting, thus avoiding the feeling that the procession has suddenly changed location. 2. After shot 3, a cut (splice visible) to a tighter shot of the front of the procession maintains a rough continuity of movement. 3. The cut (splice visible) to the next shot (5) shows a reverse angle of the retreating cortege.

least interesting portions have been removed.' And there were other lessons. For example, in Hepworth's film of Queen Victoria's funeral (1901), shots of the procession at Cowes and at Victoria Station were separated by a short shot, 'Crossing Solent'. The *Showman* advertisement said that this 'was not of sufficient interest to form a subject by itself but . . . forms the completing link in the chain.' This idea of a shot being used merely as a link would be crucial to later film-makers. And there was the cutaway. In 'Taking President McKinley's Body from Train at Canton, Ohio' (Edison, 1901), a shot looking away from the main action is inserted to avoid a jump in linking separate views of the coffin being carried. (There is also a cut into a closer shot and a reverse angle in this remarkable film.)

By 1901, therefore, actualities were employing a range of new practices, all it seems to me pointing towards the idea of sequences using interdependent shots and away from the original view of shots as individual items. How does this relate to the early film-makers in drama, who are claimed as the inventors of editing? In fact, the link was a close one, and the early development of editing in factual and fiction films may be seen as part of the same process.

Many of the drama film-makers started off by filming actuality. Hepworth, an early user of dramatic editing with *Rescued by Rover* (1905), was also a producer of factual films. James Williamson began by making actuality films, of which some (including the 1899 'Bank Holiday at the Dyke') were multi-shot. G. A. Smith also made actualities, and was probably the first to combine drama and actuality (*The Kiss in the Tunnel*, 1899). In America, Edwin Porter, famous for *The Great Train Robbery*, began by 'editing' actuality and drama films together for the Eden Musée shows.

And the actuality continued to exert a powerful influence on drama films. Many historians have observed the

'Shoot the Chutes' (Edison, 1899): Intra-scene editing. The event is covered in three shots. 1. From the bottom, showing boats coming down the slide towards us. 2. From the top, showing boats going away. 3. Point of view, with the camera filming from the descending boat.



liberating effect of exterior filming: the early films shot on location are usually more advanced in editing and use of camera angles than films made in studio sets. It has been claimed that this was due to the negative impact on studio films of the theatricality of Méliès and others. But I would argue that the positive influence of actualities may be just as important. Film-makers were used to moving their cameras about to get the best views of events; and it was only a simple step to using this technique in films involving actors.

Refining the actuality's editing techniques and extending them to drama was in itself a major creative leap, allowing all kinds of new connections between shots. For example, in Williamson's *Attack on a Chinese Mission Station* (late 1900), there is a shot of the missionary's wife waving for help and an immediate cut to a distant group of soldiers starting to the rescue. Here we have editing between simultaneous actions, a prototype of crosscutting undreamt of in actualities.

The fact remains, however, that because early cinema studies have concentrated so largely on post-1900 fiction films, the true contribution of the actuality has never been properly assessed. The often anonymous makers of these first films of real life were innovators in their own right. The 'creative treatment of actuality', as Grierson defined documentary, would seem to be almost as old as the cinema itself.

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TERRENCE RAFFERTY

Last Looks—



The former neurosurgeon Tomas (Daniel Day-Lewis).

For long stretches of Philip Kaufman's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, we seem to be looking at nothing but the eyes of lovers: gazing at each other as they lie in bed, searching for signs of infidelity; watching themselves in mirrors as they make love, mediating their intimacy with another—imagined—perspective, seeing themselves as a voyeur or an artist might; staring at rooms left empty by a vanished other and trying to gauge the finality of the departure; scanning the face of a lover who has reappeared out of nowhere and trying to judge the permanence of the return; looking through the lens of a camera at the history that changes lives, as if their eyes had become everyone's and everyone's theirs, as if the act of fixing and printing a moment of vision were the most complex kind of

personal intercourse, a way of restoring a shattered relationship with the world; or alternating glances at each other with concentration on the road ahead, their vision blurred by the rain on the windscreens and interrupted by the rhythm of the wipers (regular as a metronome or a pulse), but shared, for a few seconds, with each other and with us, in the film's, and their, last image, before everything dissolves into a whiteness that hurts our eyes.

After nearly three hours of Kaufman's film, we sit staring at a white rectangle as if at the blank page at the end of a novel we've stayed up all night to read, and try to gather all we've taken in into that space, to project on the blank screen our own most personal imagery. Our impulse, on finishing a

work we love, is to hold on to it for a while, and we strengthen our hold by means of unconscious, benign distortion of what the author has put before us—bending his point of view a few degrees until it becomes ours, freezing a handful of moments from the temporal flow of the narrative and merging them with our memories as if they were part of our own experience. The white screen at the end of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* might stand for the moment when Philip Kaufman read the final words of Milan Kundera's novel and, not wanting to let it go, gave himself over to the reverie that became this film.

Kaufman's movie is an extraordinary adaptation of a difficult book. Just how remarkable it is may not be fully apparent on a single viewing, when readers of the novel may be distracted by what looks like Kaufman's simplification of the material and also by the peculiarly *American* tone of his treatment—which is unmistakable despite the European locations and omnipresent Czech accents, the all-European cast, the Janáček music on the soundtrack, and the participation of Pierre Guffroy as production designer, Sven Nykvist as cinematographer and Jean-Claude Carrière as Kaufman's collaborator on the screenplay. This adaptation has a kind of fidelity to its source that's different from what we're used to: it's faithful to the novel as it exists in the mind of a reader, rather than to the novel considered as some sort of autonomous entity, or to a notion of the author's intent.

In interviews, Kaufman has said that the novel's most interesting character is Kundera himself, the discursive, digressive narrator who keeps interrupting the telling of his fairly simple story with long meditations on Nietzsche, Beethoven, Parmenides, kitsch, the history of Europe, the relationship between the body and the soul, and the very art of narration, and who makes clear that the story he relates in this fragmented way is just one part of his thought process, an instrument of speculation. 'It would be senseless,' he says at one point, 'for the author to try to convince the reader that his characters once actually lived'; in his new book, *The Art of the Novel*, he repeatedly defines characters as 'experimental selves'.

Without Kundera's voice, the novel would be immeasurably diminished;

paradoxically, Kaufman's elimination of it doesn't weaken the film. Kaufman seems to understand instinctively that it would be senseless for him to try to convince the audience that his film represents the mind of Milan Kundera; senseless for him to pretend that the film's characters are merely notional, speculative, since what we're watching are living, breathing actors on the screen; senseless for him to imagine the characters as someone else's experimental selves—even if such an act of projection were possible, it would drastically limit the film-maker's ability to define his own relation to the characters, which is all that matters. The movie's most interesting character is Philip Kaufman.

Kundera's novel is overtly, determinedly self-reflective. Kaufman's presence in the movie is only implicit, but no less pervasive: instead of introducing himself as a character, he simply makes self-reflection the dominant theme of the work. The staggering variety of looks the characters give each other and the world outside, with each of the film's innumerable close-ups seeming to register a fresh emotional nuance of these people's shifting, exploratory relationships, is, in a sense, a record of the film-maker's own explorations—the gaze he levels at the text and the experience it represents, his attempts to penetrate, with the lens of a camera, an alien consciousness, a history that can't be his.

We never stop being aware that this movie is an American artist's effort to understand a profoundly European sense of life, because the film is at every moment reminding us of the heart-breaking distances that separate people's imaginations, of the enormous difficulty of seeing the world through another's eyes. The air of erotic melancholy that hangs over Kaufman's film is a reflection of the distances that persist even in the most intimate relationships, of the imperfections of all our projections. There's a section of Kundera's novel called 'Words Misunderstood'; Kaufman's movie is about images misunderstood.

At one point, the film's heroine, the innocent Tereza (Juliette Binoche), is horrified to discover that photographs she has taken of the Russian invasion of Prague are being used by the Communist authorities to identify those who resisted the tanks: as her pictures are flashed before her, moments of her own experience, her eyes begin to blur and the images lose their definition. The sequence ends with an ominous close-up of the lens of the slide projector, its single eye beaming a blinding light. It's a shocking perversion of the powers of vision, and a metaphor, somehow, for the small personal betrayals that have made Tereza's marriage to the philandering Tomas (Daniel Day-Lewis) into a series of agonies for her. (She sees his acts of infidelity nightly in her dreams.) At this crucial point, about halfway through the film, we begin to sense how wide and how deep Kaufman's

ambitions are: he has conceived his *Unbearable Lightness of Being* as an epic of cognition.

The story, reduced to its outlines, would seem too fragile to support that sort of undertaking. Tomas, a talented young neurosurgeon at a Prague hospital and an inveterate womaniser, meets an earnest country girl named Tereza who becomes, much to his surprise, the first woman ever to spend an entire night in his bed—he wakes up to find her hand tightly gripping his. They marry, but Tomas continues to see other women: his favourite, and longest-running mistress is an artist named Sabina (Lena Olin), with whom he has a playful, ironic relationship defined by a fetish (a bowler hat) and an urge to watch themselves in mirrors when they make love.

After the Russian invasion in 1968, first Sabina and then Tomas and Tereza leave Czechoslovakia and settle in Switzerland, where they live, for a while, with the wary freedom of exiles until, one by one, they leave: Sabina flees to America when her earnest lover Franz (Derek de Lint) leaves his wife and announces his intention to move in with her; Tereza can't sell her photographs of Czechoslovakia and can't photograph what would sell (nudes and plants), so she returns to Prague; Tomas, the last one left, misses his wife and follows her back. Tomas can't get his old job back, because he had once, almost as a lark, written an article using Oedipus' blindness as a metaphor for totalitarianism; rather than recant, he works as a window cleaner, which gives him fresh opportunities for adultery.

Tereza, more tormented than ever by his unfaithfulness, tries to revenge herself on him (or perhaps simply to understand him) with a one-night stand of her own—but then fears that her affair was set-up, engineered by authorities watching her with hidden cameras. They move again, this time to the country, where their beloved dog dies, but they feel happier together, free of scruples.

The Prague Spring: Tomas and Tereza (Juliette Binoche).



tiny, closer. After a blissful night of drinking, dancing and making love in a country inn, their truck crashes on a slick road. Sabina gets a letter in California informing her of their deaths.

It sounds like little more than a soap opera with some political overtones, or, at best, one of those old-fashioned romances in which the lovers are 'swept up in the tides of history' or some such. In the novel, Kundera's philosophical digressions and his fragmented, non-chronological narration keep us from getting that gooey *Zhivago* feeling. But Kaufman tells the story straight, from beginning to end, flirting with the Hollywood-love-story grand manner, almost daring us to find his film banal or sentimental. He makes us realise, though, that this is the way the story has rearranged itself in our heads after reading the novel—and also that its very plainness is a large part of what makes it so moving. Kaufman's directness in this respect links him to Tomas, the no-nonsense seducer who simply gazes at women and commands 'Take off your clothes': he examines them and makes love to them at the same time. That, in a way, is what Kaufman does to Kundera's novel—he strips it so he can know and love it better.

But that's not his only mode of knowing. Sabina is one of his experimental selves, too. Her restlessness and her uninhibited sense of play are qualities that Kaufman has demonstrated, not just here, but throughout his career. His films have been unusually diverse, each one radically different from the others and stylistically eclectic in itself. *The Great Northfield, Minnesota Raid* (1972) is an atmospheric, unsentimental Western in which Jesse James is portrayed as, of all things, a religious fanatic. *The White Dawn* (1974), about a trio of New England whalers marooned among the Eskimos, is an historical film shot almost as a documentary: the loose narrative seems far less important than the anthropological investigation of the Eskimos'



The wanderer Sabina (Lena Olin).

society. His 1978 remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a surprisingly funny and lyrical science-fiction satire, in which the target of the conformity-inducing pods is the free-thinking, anything-goes culture of San Francisco. *The Wanderers* (1979) is a rambunctious comedy about Bronx gangs in the early 60s, a much more serious movie than it initially appears: in its slapdash way, it actually tries to capture and define a key moment of cultural change. And *The Right Stuff*, his 1983 adaptation of the Tom Wolfe book about test pilots and astronauts, is a three-hour all-American jamboree, a movie that mixes styles and tones so promiscuously that it seems, finally, to express everything that is most beautiful, most heroic and most irredeemably stupid about American life, all at once.

Sabina is this movie's primary wanderer: as an artist and as a woman, she shuns permanence with an instinctive horror. In Prague, her paintings are elegant, suggestive abstractions with an ominous sexuality reminiscent of Georgia O'Keeffe. In Geneva, her art is constructed of dagger-like shards of mirrors: her apartment/studio is like an Expressionist changing room, in which a visitor, undressing, is constantly surrounded by splintery images of himself. In California, Sabina spray-paints seascapes for elderly buyers: the paintings are blandly serene, as if the sea (as in Baudelaire) has become her mirror but she doesn't quite see herself in it.

Her sex scenes with Tomas are, thanks to the mirrors (she has one in Prague, too), dazzlingly complex, and all the more erotic for their formal complexity. The relationship of their bodies to each other keeps shifting in the frame, in unexpected configurations, and their (and our) angles of vision do, too. Nothing is fixed—heavy, in Kundera's terms—and their lovemaking sequences come to seem perhaps the movie's purest expression of the delights of irony: the exhilaration of seeing oneself, and others, always from a bit of a distance, of being able to observe, with amused dispassion, the infinite patterns our parts can arrange themselves in. When, on Sabina's last

night in Geneva, Tomas visits her in a hotel room and they lie in bed together looking directly into each other's faces—without benefit of mirrors for the only time in the movie—it's one of the saddest moments in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. A terrible weight seems to have settled on them. Looking straight into each other's eyes, their self-reflective irony has deserted them. Their frank gazes have the desperate, commemorative urgency of last looks: they reflect nothing but the sudden, startling desire to fix a final image of something precious about to disappear forever.

In that scene, Tomas and Sabina find themselves looking at each other, for one surprised moment, in the way that Tereza always sees the world, and from that point on, Tereza's way of seeing begins to dominate the film. There's a brief scene in which the shift is made explicit. After Tereza has left Geneva, Tomas sits in their empty apartment and stares at a small potted cactus, a bleak little object that Tereza had spent hours contemplating, because a Swiss magazine editor suggested that this was the sort of photograph he might be

interested in. Tereza has looked at this absurd thing with growing misery, unable to photograph it, unable, we feel, even to see it—an object that, like everything in Geneva, she is incapable of discovering her relation to, a sight she feels not the slightest impulse to commemorate.

As Tomas sits before the cactus, he—and we—are invaded by Tereza's vision, her frustration and despair at gazing always, in her exile, at things that remain so stubbornly outside her, things she can never truly feel are hers. As if possessed by Tereza's spirit, Tomas, too, goes back, and the film takes on a more sombre tone. At first, we miss Sabina mightily: the sequences that follow Tomas' return to Prague (and precede the final, pastoral section) are the shakiest passages in the film. Even Kaufman seems a little dispirited: deprived of the occasions to exercise his visual inventiveness that Sabina's scenes provided him, his movie-making briefly loses a bit of its zest. But Tereza's world-view does finally take hold, because Kaufman has prepared us for it—it has always been one of the possible visions proposed by the movie—and because Tereza, too, is clearly an aspect of himself.

In the first section of the film, before the invasion, Tereza, though charmingly played by Binoche, is nearly as puzzling to us as she is to Tomas. She's unformed, compared to the other characters, and her simplicity and possessiveness seem out of place in the liberated atmosphere of Dubcek-era Prague: she's an outsider among the sophisticates, an intent but slightly baffled observer. The exuberance of these early sequences suggests that this period in Czech history is, for Kaufman, the easiest part of the story to represent—a time when his characters live, in a sense, as Americans do, heedlessly and optimistically. He doesn't need to assume Tereza's perspective until the tanks roll in and he has to call on something that will take him far beyond the

First looks: Tereza and Tomas.



frame of his own experience.

The invasion sequence is Tereza's first big moment, and Kaufman does it full justice. It's a wrenching montage of stock footage and stills, mostly in black and white, intercut with shots of Tomas and Tereza rushing through the crowds (all shot as if they, too, were part of the grainy film), as Tereza snaps more and more pictures: finally, almost all of what we're seeing is imagery her camera has caught. Kaufman's treatment of the invasion is actually fuller and more emotionally intense than Kundera's, for a good reason: Kundera needs to distance himself from this pivotal event in his life, to gain perspective on it; Kaufman, who has experienced the invasion only through documentary footage, newspaper photos, and Kundera, needs to get closer.

And that's why Tereza becomes more important to Kaufman as the film goes on, why he treats her with greater tenderness than her creator does. Kundera sees her fierce attachment to home, her heavier passions, as weakness, and in doing so seems to be conducting an argument with himself—against whatever impulses he might feel to return to his native country. To Kaufman, however, she is the mystery that must be penetrated for him to make this film: the most rooted of the characters, the least 'American' in spirit. And in the invasion sequence, we feel the excite-

ment of his discovery of what connects him to her. Her picture-taking brings everything into focus. He understands, because he's such an emotional image-maker himself, her impulse to fix moments on film as a way of making sense of her own life: her need to possess these images and her need to possess Tomas are essentially the same urge—an urge that can't be so unlike what impelled Philip Kaufman to put this book on film.

Between the invasion and Tomas' return to Prague, Tereza's point of view gathers force. In that section of the film, there's an extraordinary sequence in which Tereza and Sabina take turns photographing each other in the nude in Sabina's mirror-crammed studio. This is the scene in which the movie's experiments in vision come together, the give-and-take of the two women's examinations of each other complicated by the implicit presence of Tomas: looking at each other unclothed, each is aware that she is seeing what Tomas has also seen. By the end of this superbly choreographed play of visions, some miraculous unity seems to have been achieved, a resolution of Tomas' and Sabina's and Tereza's points of view into a single, undifferentiated image of happiness as the two women lie naked and laughing on the floor. (This is, surely, just as Tomas would imagine it.) But that image is erased immediately by the arrival of Franz, which

precipitates Sabina's flight from Geneva and thus begins the process of sending the characters again on their separate roads.

It's no wonder that Tereza's possessive spirit holds sway in the second half of the film. The moment of harmony dissolved so quickly, and nothing like it occurs again until the very end, during Tomas and Tereza's night at the inn and their drive home. Through the artifice of Kaufman's editing, Sabina seems to be present, too. The scene in which she receives the news of their deaths comes halfway through the dancing, so the rest of Tomas and Tereza's story might almost be happening in her imagination. Tomas turns to Tereza and says, 'I'm thinking how happy I am,' in the moment before the screen—their view of the road—begins to go white, another harmonious vision vanishing too soon. But in this movie Philip Kaufman has made such a vision appear before our eyes twice, with Tereza on screen both times, as if her dogged, heavy, loving spirit had led him to it once and then again, as she led Tomas back to Prague. She's the film-maker's guide both because she's the farthest from him and because she's the nearest. She seems to have made him believe that the taking of images—the impulse to hold on to what we love—is the highest form of reading the world, and the truest guarantee of eternal return. ■

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Amicable confidences

L'Ami de mon amie & 4 Aventures de Reinette & Mirabelle/Tom Milne

At the beginning of *L'Ami de mon amie* (Artificial Eye), the last in Eric Rohmer's sextet of 'Comedies and Proverbs', Blanche (Emmanuelle Chaulet) is lunching alone in the town hall canteen when Léa (Sophie Renoir) asks if she can sit at her table. Blanche, employed in the cultural affairs department, has a right to be there; Léa hasn't, but her difficulty with restaurants is that men will persist in trying to pick her up. You hardly need to be told, as the two girls amicably exchange confidences, that Blanche is dispiritedly uncommitted—a state of non-affairs that may well have endured for some time—while Léa is contentedly shacked up with a boyfriend, Fabien (Eric Viillard).

Mutually impelled, perhaps, by the other's situation as their friendship evolves, Blanche develops lovelorn eyes for Alexandre (François-Eric Gendron), a handsome wolf who half-heartedly tries to pick her up at the swimming-pool, while Léa begins to entertain restless thoughts about leaving Fabien for pastures new. The problem is that Blanche goes all tongue-tied when she thinks her heart is engaged (Fabien, now, she can talk to); and that Léa proves to be much more the type that Alexandre goes for. When feelings finally get sorted out into the more satisfactory pairings of Blanche/Fabien and Léa/Alexandre, there remains the stumbling-block—'My friends are my friends,' is the film's motto—that it simply isn't done to pinch your friend's

lover. Not without permission, at least.

An elegant little rondo of love's surprises and confusions, *L'Ami de mon amie* is textured by that peculiar psychological phenomenon which Rohmer understands so well and employs so cunningly: the inability of the average human being to avoid being emotionally affected by what he or she is told someone else feels about him/her. Here, the re-pairing of the quartet is inaugurated by Léa's confidence-boosting assurance to Blanche that Alexandre is merely waiting for a sign of encouragement from her (which makes poor Blanche even more idiotically inarticulate, snuffing out whatever slight interest Alexandre may have entertained); and it is completed by the intervention of Alexandre's discarded mistress Adrienne (Anne-Laure Meury), who tries to dig a vengeful bit of ground from under Léa by assuring Blanche that Fabien is very much taken with her. When the muddle is eventually resolved to everybody's satisfaction, and it seems that the good old mating instincts have confirmed the rightness of the choices willed by the quartet, Rohmer airily contrives to suggest (through the dissenting colour coordination of the clothes they are wearing at the end) that *la ronde* may well not be over yet.

Like the earlier *4 Aventures de Reinette & Mirabelle* (Artificial Eye), *L'Ami de mon amie* is a film of ineffable grace and charm, yet has about it an air of insubstantiality that leaves one not

entirely satisfied. Yet substantiality, in a film-maker so exclusively preoccupied by the eternal shadow-boxing war conducted between intellect and instinct—with both constantly confounded by external moral imperatives they have failed to take into account—is a difficult quality to define. What is it, exactly, that makes *Ma Nuit chez Maud* or *Le Genou de Claire* seem to weigh more heavily in the balance than *L'Amour l'après-midi*, say, or *La Femme de l'aviateur*? Perhaps the difference is merely an illusion, nourished by the way the settings and seasons (the tranquil end-of-summer lakeside in *Genou de Claire*, the wintry urban landscape in *Ma Nuit chez Maud*) seemed to orchestrate the emotional predicament of the central character to such perfection.

4 Aventures de Reinette & Mirabelle, at all events, was literally conceived as a divertissement: a film more or less improvised on the basis of anecdotes of Parisian student life confided to Rohmer by Joëlle Miquelle (who ended up in effect playing herself as Reinette), and shot during a hiatus in the filming of *Le Rayon vert* while Rohmer was patiently waiting for the phenomenon of the green ray to manifest itself. Basically an anthology of four shaggy dog stories illustrating the nascent friendship between two girls and the moral divide between pragmatism and idealism that marks their different approaches to life, it is remarkable chiefly for its air of breezily insolent spontaneity. As they take to their heels in disarray when subjected to a wonderfully paranoid tirade of perverted logic by a waiter asked for change in a café, or get hopelessly tangled in the choices of charity when confronted by the professional expertise of beggars and shoplifters, one might easily be watching an unearthed treasure from the early days of the *Nouvelle Vague*, excitedly witnessing the emergence of a new name in movies.

L'Ami de mon amie is very different. Set in the new town of Cergy-Pontoise—one of those suburban horrors, all shopping malls, high-rise and grandiose architectural follies—it takes a while to get going as the two girls ease into their relationship and the spectator finds little on which the eye can gratefully rest. Gradually, though, as Blanche returns to roost in her luxurious all mod con apartment in a high-rise whose courtyard is portentously landscaped by a Palladian-style perspective of Roman pillars and archways, one begins to realise that Rohmer has cast Cergy-Pontoise as a stage set on which, with himself amusedly watching from a seat on Olympus, these poor mortals go through their (to them) deadly serious mating rituals. Amazingly, well into his sixties, Rohmer retains the flexibility to pass from the eye of a tyro to that of an old master within the blink of a film. □

Someone to watch over me

Cop/Richard Combs

It is nearly twenty-five years since James B. Harris emerged from behind the scenes of the three films he produced for Stanley Kubrick (*The Killing*, *Paths of Glory*, *Lolita*) to become a director himself. In a sense, it's a transition that is still under way. In that time, Harris has directed four films, rivalling the lengthy gestation period of each new Kubrick project, those hiatuses that are as much evidence of the director's control as the films themselves, when he scans the globe for the 'right' subject. In Harris' case, the delays seem rather to be evidence of a director unwilling to come into his own, of an interesting creative personality who has, ironically, lost his sense of how to get produced. If Harris hasn't fully 'come out' as a director, he has also retained something of the innocence—and the naivety—of the tyro. It's this which gives his films their singular tone and texture, as if a cynical potboiler were always about to turn into a wide-eyed fable—or the reverse, as in the case of *Some Call It Loving*, his most blatant fairy tale.

Cop (Entertainment) should be as slick and highly wired as any recent psycho-on-the-loose thriller, being adapted from James Ellroy's powerful if gloatingly written *Blood on the Moon*, and geared to the over-wired energies of James Woods. But with a beginner's insouciance, Harris is also liable to switch or confuse moods, so that cynicism can become a reverse romanticism, and either can be pushed to the edge of parody. The film actually begins with some nicely judged comedy, which is simply voices heard over the credits, as a would-be-burglar tries to report a particularly gruesome murder he has stumbled on, and is driven to distraction by a medley of operators and recorded voices, responding to a final request to insert more change with 'I'm down to my stolen credit cards—can I use those?' The murder falls to the lot of Detective Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins (Woods)—or rather he seizes upon it, although out of his district, because he is obsessed with such crimes against women. Before long, he has linked the case with various unsolved homicides over the past fifteen years, and constructed a profile of a serial killer who is driven to destroy innocence, that same innocence which Hopkins is crusading to protect.

His notion of protection is also a form of destruction, since he believes that women should be disabused of their romanticism, of a belief in white knights and happy-ever-after endings. In the world he knows, this kind of innocence kills. Again, in wonderfully comic illustration of this principle, Hop-

kins is seen tiptoeing into his small daughter's bedroom after a hard day dealing with the 'shit storm' in the streets, and launching into a 'once upon a time' tale that is a graphic account of his recent cases. That this is an agreed and agreeable form of anti-fairy tale is confirmed by a wide grin and angelic request at the end, 'Tell me how you got the scumbag, daddy.' All of which suggests the familiar theme of the obsessive cop who comes to resemble his demented quarry, that the profile of the killer also fits the cop as a destroyer of innocence. This is certainly the point of Ellroy's novel, where the *rapprochement* of cop and killer even continues after the latter's death, when the seriously wounded Hopkins is given a transfusion of his adversary's blood. Implicitly there's a similar relationship here, although the film is not very interested in exploring it. Or rather Harris has tended to emphasise the separate myths his characters live by, the stories they tell each other. And the ambivalence that attaches to Hopkins, the determined demythologiser, has to do with exactly what personal fairy tale he is inhabiting.

It's here that *Cop* begins to seem most off-centre as a genre film, because it begins to behave more like *Some Call It Loving*, which was about a ruthlessly romantic dreamer who failed his own

Cop: James Woods.



dreams. Harris has, in the first place, defused the psycho-sexual thriller by weakening the motivation for the murders, substituting for the killer's homosexual rape while at high school the rape of another character, Kathleen McCarthy (Lesley Ann Warren). Instead of horror at what was revealed in himself, the killer's motive becomes revenge for the violation of another. This takes the rather attenuated form of his slaughtering innocent, virginal girls like the ones who had formed Kathleen's high-school court of aloof, poetic types. They had also believed in myths of the prince who would one day come, but had deserted their leader after she betrayed their tenet of sexual purity by getting raped. Hopkins follows a lead to Kathleen, who is now running a bookshop for feminist poetry. The lighted sign outside, 'Feminist Bibliophile', and the house that doubles as her shop, gives this a rather Grimm's air, and sure enough Kathleen's feminism turns out to be a shaky front for her romantic illusions and disappointments.

Hopkins' hard-boiled attitudes, the film implies, might make him a better feminist. But it also takes a harder line with Hopkins himself, who in his single-minded crusade against the delusions of faith—as exemplified by Kathleen preserving the floral tributes the killer has been sending her, or by Hopkins' unsympathetic 'born again' Christian commander—falls victim to his own illusions. He exploits and misuses something which the film is careful to distinguish from faith, 'trust'. The latter is embodied most substantially in Hopkins' mentor and protector on the police force, 'Dutch' Pelz (Charles Durning), who fields interference, facilitates Hopkins' maverick investigation, and in one intriguing shift of allegiances takes over from him as the only police officer whom Kathleen will trust. And if Hopkins abuses the trust of his friend, perhaps he does something worse to his family, who disappear from the picture soon after the scene where Hopkins delivers his antidote to anodyne bedtime stories.

In Harris' spaced-out filmography, Hopkins might be the theme that links films as different as *The Bedford Incident* and *Some Call It Loving*. In all three films, the protagonists are inspired madmen with an absolute rationale for the world that fails to rationalise their own behaviour. Perhaps there's even a link here back to the Harris-Kubrick partnership, to the particular relationship between an obsessive creator and his mild-mannered 'other half'. In *Cop*, Lloyd Hopkins (who is often referred to in the original novel as a 'genius') sets out, with no sense of his own flaws or limitations, to transform the world, but needs someone like Pelz (Dutch uncle/father figure/indulgent producer?) to watch over him. □

Patterman

Good Morning, Vietnam
Anthony Quinn

When he plays to his strengths, director Barry Levinson is capable of some wonderful, freewheeling comedy, nowhere more winningly exemplified than in *Diner*, one of the key movies of this decade. Levinson's talent for the male ensemble clicked quite brilliantly here, and at a stroke he proved that no other director—with the possible exception of Scorsese—was quite so well tuned to the nuances and inflections of guys' talk, their relaxed badinage and swaggering braggadocio. Last year's *Tin Men* was a sentimental return to Levinson's home territory of Baltimore, and while the banter was just as smart there was an underlying sadness seeping through these middle-aged hucksters which ran counter to *Diner*'s upbeat optimism.

There are even darker shadows playing over *Good Morning, Vietnam* (Warner Bros), but Levinson never allows his seriousness to unbalance the comedy. It's the story of Adrian Cronauer, a disc jockey who brings his riotously unconventional show to Saigon for the Armed Forces radio early in 1965, a crucial year in the Vietnam war. In the spring, President Johnson made the commitment to increase American troops from 50,000 to 105,000, the beginning of a storm which culminated in the Tet offensive three years later. Reports of this escalation are withheld for fear of demoralising the troops, so Cronauer soon ruffles their feathers by sneaking unedited news items over the airwaves. And to the further chagrin of his commanding officers, the man himself becomes a massive hit with a playlist which ditches Percy Faith and Loretta Lynn in favour of rumbustious rock 'n' roll classics.

As played by Robin Williams, Cronauer is a hypercharged, manic jack-in-the-box, a motormouth whose spiel hits you so fast that you're always at least two lines behind. Williams is an extraordinary performer, which is dangerous in a way because it is so much his film that he's often on the verge of eclipsing all around him. But he is gamely supported by a first-rate cast, some of whom will be familiar from *Tin Men*, such as J. T. Walsh as a malicious sergeant-major bent on discrediting Cronauer and Bruno Kirby as an uptight lieutenant who briefly—and disastrously—fills in for the show when Cronauer is suspended, and who can't understand why his selection of polkas and sense of humour are so unappreciated ('I know I'm funny,' he tells himself with po-faced determination).

Yet I found my enjoyment of the film rather at odds with a nagging doubt as to Cronauer's plausibility, which relates



Good Morning, Vietnam: Robin Williams.

in turn to the wider problem of American films about Nam. The man is just too good to be true, boosting the morale of homesick grunts, cocking a snook at authority and fraternising with the native community, via his friendship with a young Vietnamese boy and his winsome sister. This isn't a *wi*—this is a saint. You can't shake the feeling that hindsight has bathed Levinson's drama in a cosy, liberal glow, and that this is another variation on Hollywood's attempt to purge the collective conscience. Last year we had the combat-zone nightmares of *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Hamburger Hill*: now we have the War of Laughter and Forgetting.

In fairness to Levinson, his aim is

primarily to entertain, and for most of the time he does so with spirited panache. Despite an irritating practice of cutting away from Williams' lively (and probably ad-libbed) patter to shots of the gis creased up with laughter—we don't need to be reminded that this guy is funny—Levinson gives his man a more or less free rein, and a real zinger of a sequence when he's grooving ecstatically to the James Brown tune 'I Got You (I Feel Good)'. All things considered, it would be rather mean-spirited not to recommend the film, but within its genre (and by now Vietnam films must constitute a genre) the best one can say is that it's not contemptible. □

The Swamps of Academe

A Very Peculiar Practice/James Price

The very peculiar practice of the BBC's *A Very Peculiar Practice*, written by Andrew Davies and directed by David Tucker, is a medical one, set in the postwar university of Lowlands. It's clear from the outset that it's pretty strange, run by a quartet of doctors three of whom are either monsters or exhibit a remarkable degree of negligence. And the university, though normal enough at first glance, turns out to be the sort of place where a librarian may twist an ankle in the photocopier and the Arts Council Fellow in Creative Writing (Joe Melia) complains that every very peculiar absurdity he thinks up is immediately trumped by an even more peculiar reality. It's a peculiarity that progresses. In the first series, John Bird, playing the Vice-Chancellor as a workaholic bureaucrat, is brisk, effective and recognisable. In the second, Jack Daniels (Michael J. Shannon), his successor as Vice-Chancellor, is clearly in the mould of General

Ripper, and very peculiar indeed.

Dr Jock McCannon (Graham Crowden) sees the university in apocalyptic terms, with Jack Daniels as the prince of darkness. But Jock, with his awareness of his own mortality and with the cassette recorder into which he confides the fragments he has shored against his ruins, is perhaps a wee bit more eccentric than his surroundings. The imposed 25 per cent cut in the establishment at the end of the first series, the hacking back of the humanities department in favour of cash-attracting cybernetics, electro-acoustics or secret projects for defence, the pricing of student accommodation out of the reach of students, the student uprising at the end of the second series, are not so exaggerated. Are they? My eyebrows are not raised very much. As much as a gloss on Thatcherism in the 80s these events are a looking back at the late 60s and early 70s, to the time of R. D. Laing and the Maharishi and the book Jock once wrote



A Very Peculiar Practice: Barbara Flynn. Photo: Lu Jeffery.

about Freud. The book, alas, is now remaindered, forming another mournful iambic statement for Jock's musings. Outside, the two nuns engaging in manic skirmishing with the refuse collectors merely reinforce the feeling that revolutions belong to the past, and the future belongs to the system.

Andrew Davies seems to be a cheerful soul. It is characteristic of the writing to offer conventional propositions, and to sustain them only minimally; and I suppose that's a consequence of planning for a series—now two series, each of seven episodes. The idea of the liberal university is one such conventional proposition. It's shown to be under attack; it's defended; it's argued about. Feminism is another. A feminist point of view will be put forward to be joked about but then validated. The episode of the Eng. Lit. professor (James Grout) in the second series brings some of these threads together in a typically nonchalant way. Accused by two women students of requiring them to read obscene poems by Swift and Rochester, he vindicates himself by claiming his prerogative for setting the curriculum. To two different women, in a scene of risky seriousness, he reads Donne. It's not literary points that are being made but, in the first instance, a literary-based observation about learning in a university and, in the second, something about literature leading to action. At the end of the episode he leaves, saying that he's an old freak and out of touch. Limits of time, and the typically brusque handling of ideas, prevent any further development.

There is, however, a noticeable difference between the first and second series. Episodic as it remains, the second has a greater continuity between episodes. The love life of Dr Stephen Dacre (Peter Davison), Dr Blue Eyes to the student magazine, is one thread. In the second series he goes over with the Polish art historian Greta the relationship he

had in the first series with Lyn, policewoman-to-be. In each case he is hopefully passive, playing a doggy game according to a set of rules laid down for him. Jock's sepulchral utterances form a second thread, culminating in his rejuvenation in the arms of the Vice-Chancellor's wife and the transformation of his vocabulary.

But the principal development in the second series takes place in the characters of Dr Robert Buzzard and Dr Rose Marie. Robert Buzzard must be one of the worst doctors to have practised in television drama, and that's quite a roll-call. He is indifferent to his patients, eager to ingratiate himself with authority, intent on making private gains on the side. He is vain, bullying, hyperactive, hopelessly dependent on his wife Daphne, totally incapable of coming to terms with his own nature. With his wheedling voice and emotional outbursts he behaves as what he still wishes he were, fourteen years old, in charge of the dormitory, and allowed to slipper anyone he wishes to. In the first series his character is established. In the second it takes off. Daphne leaves him. He develops a fondness for a young athlete, but recoils when he understands what sort of fondness it is. Will he, won't he, come out of the closet? That he doesn't have a kind of harsh rightness about it. David Troughton plays the part with extraordinary assurance and energy; and he is also touching, a sad clown in the marmalade-stained Savile Row suit he earns for his entrepreneurial activities.

Dr Rose Marie is a monster of another sort. Author of a forthcoming book from Virago and utterer of a line about illness being something done by men to women, she must have excited some hatred over the airwaves. I wondered whether it wasn't asking too much of an actress, to give a part such dedicated awfulness. And how could the misogyny level be controlled? I'm not sure that

it was. Rose Marie has one redeeming feature: she appears to be a good doctor. She is also devious, scheming and treacherous. Barbara Flynn plays the part with a riveting, level-voiced, husky and somewhat matronly sexiness. I thought she was quite wonderful.

Finally, the second series introduces a new character, Jack Daniels. Shadowed by his bodyguards, he pauses. What is he hearing? The voice, hazards Stephen, of John F. Kennedy? The voice of God? No, it's the Soviets who are listening, and they're listening to him. It's a forgivable confusion on Stephen's part, since at times Daniels is prone to mistaking himself for Kennedy. The writing of scenes and dialogue for this character is brilliantly harsh and crisp. And the acting and direction also: most particularly in the scene where, in bed with Rose Marie, he hears her embarking on a long exposition ending in the word marriage. The horror of the midnight cowboy at the realisation that he's being trapped is a moment not to be forgotten.

At the end of the second series, with Jock dead and the university a secret defence institution, Stephen gets ready to leave for Poland with Greta. Poland may not be unlike Lowlands. In fact, Poland is perhaps like England, with nervously repressive authority coexisting with liberal and anarchic habits of thought. At any rate, Andrew Davies' England is not like the England Orwell knew or foresaw: it is both too frivolous and too marginal. The scenes of power and ambition played out in the pissant swamp don't in the long run matter too much, even for the losers. A campus sitcom at peak viewing time may contain some hard truths, but it can't rub them in too heavily. And the business of *A Very Peculiar Practice* is to build sharp and effective comedy on a base of serious matters which never become solemn. □

Graham Crowden.



Older women

Talking Heads/John Pym

British actors relish texts, are trained to worry the meaning out of them. And if one recent film proves this, it is surely *Little Dorrit*, the principal distinction of which is not its lovingly stitched costumes, its brilliantly constricted framing, a design which conjures something out of nothing, nor even its long, tenacious years of production, but the variety and majesty of its acting.

It is a cavalcade of British actors, and tucked away in a corner is one of our most famous walk-ons, Alan Bennett. Which is not to say, of course, that Bennett is averse to larger roles, just that stardom in the conventional sense does not appear to do a great deal for him. As an actor, he is at his best, perhaps, in a role such as Lord Pinkrose in the recent TV adaptation of the *Balkan Trilogy*: his speech on Byron forever postponed, until at last, no further delay being brooked, he mounts the podium only to be cut down, in error, by the assassin's bullet just as he is clearing his throat.

In *Little Dorrit* he plays some sort of clerical gentleman, the perennial guest at other, richer people's parties: a listener-in, perhaps, on the conversation of strangers. As far as Alan Bennett the writer goes, however, this is of course something of a blind: his talents are much more various—he is the creator, after all, and to take only two fairly recent examples, of a sharply funny period-piece about the delayed butchery of a pig, and of an obsessive, surreal farce about the materialisation of Franz Kafka and Max Brod in an

unsuspecting English household.

But it is as Bennett the listener-in that he has become chiefly lodged in the public imagination, and in his new series of six monologues, *Talking Heads*, produced for BBC TV by Innes Lloyd, he does not disappoint expectations—after the Nine O'Clock News expectations, that is, not Royal Court expectations. Some familiar voices echo here. Notably, perhaps, that of Thora Hird, one of his favourite actresses, whose Yorkshire sucked-in breath is quintessential Alan Bennett. She plays a widow of 75, living alone in her modest home, the front garden concreted for convenience, her overriding fear the shadow of the residential home. Her passion for dusting leads to a fall; but her real downfall is caused by one Zulema (every syllable extended), a terror from the social services, in whose hands the old lady's fate rests, but whose competence as a house-cleaner leaves almost everything to be desired.

Talking Heads finds Bennett in a mood of unrelieved melancholy, though of course a sizable streak of melancholy runs through most of his work. The five women who address the camera are all, in their own ways, self-deluders: Maggie Smith, the despairing vicar's wife, the sort of drunk who believes no one notices, because she herself doesn't really care; Julie Walters, an actress ('In a nutshell I play the kind of girl who's very much at home on a bar stool and who seldom has to light her own cigarette') buoyed—heaven knows why—by the notion of her professionalism; Stephanie Cole, another widow (but an upper middle-class one this time, no trouble to anyone and oozing gentility), gypped of her money by a rascally son and refusing to recognise that her husband abused their now unhinged daughter; and Patricia Routledge (that other, absolutely sure Bennett voice), a one-woman neighbourhood watch scheme, the writer of streams of letters to the appropriate authorities. And then there is Bennett himself, surrounded as it were by older women, as Graham, the slightly not quite right son, whose mam threatens, terrifyingly, to set up housekeeping with a man from her past.

What distinguishes these plain tales of ordinary unhappiness, capably if invisibly directed by Bennett, Giles Foster, Tristram Powell and Stuart Burge, and discreetly designed by Tony Burrough, is the opportunity they give their interpreters for the teasing out of subtexts. The subtexts are not buried very deep; and this, in a way, is why the gentlest of British touches is called for.

Take Maggie Smith, a great physical

actress, universally admired, her mannerisms common coin. Here, however, she is called upon simply to sit and ruminate, for most of the time largely without make-up, her hair all over the place. In short, a frump. Bennett profers an unprotected challenge, doubly unprotected since the miserable vicar's wife with the ridiculous husband is an English archetype. This, however, is meat to the lioness. The technique of speaking long prose passages, of building an understated, inconsequential story to the slow fade-out without giving it a dying fall is carried off to perfection. One could imagine Maggie Smith *acting* the great battle of the church ladies over who is to decorate the altar, with the vicar's wife periodically sliding off to the vestry, but the description of this scene is perhaps far more pointed, since one also hears in the voice the narrator's supreme lack of self-awareness.

Or consider Julie Walters, a wholly different actress, noisy and self-consciously harum-scarum, who is, it might seem, typecast as the relentless chatterbox. But the text is there with its intricate pattern of 'he said' and 'she replied', of direct speech retailed by the narrator; and the result is an extraordinarily controlled performance, deeply felt and filled with pathos. This is the poor girl's big break, 'Travis', the gangster's intellectual moll in a West German skinflit, angled at the video market. She pleads with the director, the dour Gunther, for some direction, any direction; and when at last she receives some numbskull suggestion of her character's motivation, almost with relief casts off her bikini bottom. What could not this actress have done with a hand-tailored Alan Bennett script? □

Stephanie Cole.



A hatred of sham

IL ETAIT UNE FOIS... SAMUEL FULLER

Histoires d'Amérique racontées à Jean Narboni et Noël Simsolo

Cahiers du Cinéma/149FF

Cite Michael Powell these days as a major film-maker, even with the once infamous *Peeping Tom* in mind, and you will find few demurrs. Sam Fuller, now, is a different story, one told all too clearly by the grudging reception accorded to *White Dog* and *The Big Red One* in contrast to the delighted accolades that greeted the recent revival of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. Time was when Powell's quirkish fantasy seemed an insuperable stumbling-block: what on earth did that apparently reputable country magistrate think he was doing prowl the night and pouring glue on girls' hair in *A Canterbury Tale*? The answer that it was an entertaining as well as effective strategy, giving texture and urgency to the film's prayer for the preservation of an English heritage under threat of extinction, would hardly raise an eyebrow now. Fuller's 'cinema fist', on the other hand, still seems to be in need of explanation, given that misconceptions linger, ranging from memories of *Pickup on South Street* as rabidly Commiebaiting to distaste for *White Dog* as morbidly racist.

Exemplary as interview books go, one could hardly ask for a better interpreter than *Il était une fois... Samuel Fuller*, especially as Fuller emerges not only as a marvellous raconteur and an engaging guide through the byways of history, but as lucid, logical and entirely consistent in defining his personal standpoint. The key to both the man and his movies is a hatred of sham in all its forms, in particular the ploys resorted to in Hollywood (like sugaring the pill of interracial romance by having white actresses play squaws and not live happily ever after) to let liberal consciences have their fling without upsetting any status quo.

Fuller films, as anyone with an eye to look and an ear to listen will know, are powerful both as stimulants and as irritants precisely because of their insistence on cutting through the bullshit. You find abrasive little asides (like the photograph of Karl Marx in the newspaper office window in *Park Row*, which everyone around the set



The Big Red One: Samuel Fuller, Mark Hamill.

assumed was Longfellow or some similarly irreproachable patriarch; but Fuller was recalling that Pulitzer, he of the prestigious Prize and of the *New York World*, had published the first English edition of *Das Kapital*; and you find more subversive jabs (like the dialogue exchange between two GIs in *Fixed Bayonets* mocking the official description of the Korean War as a 'maintenance of order'). Not all Fuller's audacities survived studio timidity: Barbara Stanwyck, thanks to box-office considerations, survives being deliberately shot dead by the man who loves her in *Forty Guns* when he finds himself in an impasse; and the climactic battle in *Merrill's Marauders* now elides the fact that, in their panicky confusion, Americans are firing on Americans, Japanese on Japanese.

In a sense, the book emerges as the story of a war—good-humoured as recalled by Fuller—with Hollywood principles and practice. A war in which Darryl Zanuck emerges as a valued ally, enabling Fuller to break several taboos, not least in having a Japanese actress play the Japanese girl with whom Robert Stack walks off into the sunset at the end of *House of Bamboo*, or in having Robert Ryan's homosexual involvement with Stack clearly legible in the same film. Sad casualties of that war include his original conception for *Underworld USA* as revolving around a nationwide move by prostitutes to unionise the profession (Fuller's description of the credits sequence he envisaged is fabulous), and an invitation from Hawks to script Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Baulking at the prospect of a romantic odyssey leading to the heroine's discovery that the object of her passion had been

unmanned by a war wound, Fuller proposed to open with a scene in a field hospital, the surgeon holding up a testicle with suitable words of commiseration, and the heroine looking bleakly on as a nurse, so that she knows all along. It makes sense as a reworking of a dubious novel, but in Hollywood...

More importantly, perhaps, the book (sensibly organised to cover the three main battlefronts of Fuller's life: journalism, the cinema, World War Two) imperceptibly builds up to an ideological portrait of Fuller within a specific American historical context. The groundwork is laid by his vivid description of becoming a newsvendor, then copyboy before his fourteenth birthday; an event somehow given legendary dimensions by the fact that he was working in the building where Ned Buntline published his dime novels mythologising the heroes of the Wild West, that the current proprietor was William Randolph Hearst (whose *New York Evening Journal* is specifically identified in *Citizen Kane* as the newspaper taken over by the budding young tycoon), and that his next editor was Emile Gauvreau (immortalised as the inspiration behind both *The Front Page* and *Five Star Final*). Historical continuity, the presence of the past adumbrating the future factually or fictionally, is of crucial importance to Fuller; and here is where he echoes Michael Powell's almost mystical love of England with a similar feeling for America.

Not of course the America of right or left wing factions engaged in everyday conflict (on the Cold War ethos, Fuller is scathing about McCarthy and his minions; admired the Hollywood liberals who stood up to be counted, but didn't join them

because—especially where there is no valid enemy to engage—preachment gets nowhere), but something much more radical than that. The brave new world of Thomas Jefferson, perhaps, envisaged (if not entirely realised) when he drafted the Declaration of Independence. Lurking behind every Sam Fuller film, buried deep but unshakeably rooted, is the conviction that all men are born free, equal, and endowed with the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness. Odd, perhaps, even perverse when you consider such variously provocative films as *Pickup on South Street*, *Run of the Arrow*, *The Crimson Kimono* or *The Naked Kiss*, but none the less true. Read Fuller's reminiscences and be persuaded.

TOM MILNE

Starving Hitchcocks

HITCHCOCK AND SELZNICK

by Leonard J. Leff

Weidenfeld & Nicolson/£16.95

The ten years that Alfred Hitchcock spent under contract to David Selznick, from 1938 to 1947, was a period of transition, from the reputation of a 'director of little British thrillers' to the legend of the Buddha-like 'master' (of something that could bridge thrillers, comedy and melodrama), from the journeyman film-maker to the lordly producer-director. At the same time, the films that Hitchcock made with Selznick—with the exception of *Notorious*—have never been ranked with his best, and the Hitchcock 'touch' is generally thought to have been squelched by the overly generous hand of the producer of *Gone With the Wind*.

Leonard J. Leff's account of that period attempts to do two things. One is to document all those changes in Hitchcock's career, position and persona (and the less happy ones in Selznick's), which it does painstakingly, informatively and entertainingly. The second is to adjust the balance in the standard view of that creative partnership, to give more credit to Selznick and to show how his lush, high-toned house style (elaborate production values, nuanced psychological detail, smoothly integrated plot and characters) helped in the evolution of the Hitchcock style. This is speculative, tentative and at times tendentious, mainly because it leads to rather sweeping distinctions between British

and American Hitchcock, oversimplifying the multifarious Hitchcocks to which the book is otherwise a testament: 'Along with *Rebecca* and *Shadow of a Doubt* . . . *Spellbound* and Selznick moved Hitchcock a commanding distance away from the fairy-tale melodramas of his British period and toward the profound psychological realism of his 1950s masterpieces.'

Interestingly enough, in Hitchcock's discussions with Truffaut, *Rebecca* is often referred to as 'fable-like' or a 'fairy-tale'. When Hitchcock asserts that 'I'm not aware of any of my other pictures resembling a fairy-tale,' Truffaut argues that anything dealing with fear 'takes us back to childhood. All children's literature is linked to sensations and particularly to fear.' To which Hitchcock adds the rider that the eerie isolation of the house in *Rebecca* is an effect repeated in *The Birds*. To be sure, Leff's account of the making of *Rebecca* stresses the give and take, between Selznick's insistence on fidelity to Daphne du Maurier's romantic melodrama and Hitchcock's urge to impose the 'frisky' tone of his British pictures, the little touches of humour and irony and certainly playfulness with his

original text. But in trying to argue that Hitchcock learned artistically from Selznick, to give his stories more weight and his characters more substance ('British Hitchcock had been emotionally thin, *Rebecca* was robust'), he often misrepresents the Hitchcock who had gone before and the one who came after.

A similar point crops up with Leff's discussion of the films Hitchcock made immediately after his Selznick term—*Rope* and *Under Capricorn*—when he could do exactly what he wanted, working for his own company, without the constant nagging of Selznick's famous memos. To Leff, these two films, commercial flops and not jewels in Hitchcock's critical crown either, were evidence of how arid and indulgent he could become when left to his 'technical' experiments (here the ten-minute take) without a strong producer leaning on him to give as much attention to content as to form. It's a valid point, but there's also a sense in which 50s masterpieces like *Rear Window* owe as much if not more to the point-of-view experiments of something like *Rope* as to the solid dramatic values stressed by Selznick.

In a book which is such a fascinating account of this cru-

cial period of in-between Hitchcock, there is no need to belabour this particular point. In the main, Leff has followed his sources (largely the Selznick Collection at the University of Texas) without making too many large claims for artistic influence, and is cautious in summing up the producer-director relationship: 'History subsequently proved that Selznick needed Hitchcock more than Hitchcock needed Selznick, yet Hitchcock did not succeed despite Selznick any more than Selznick succeeded because of Hitchcock.' The book is best not as a reading of the films but as the account of a power struggle, over matters financial, contractual and artistic.

In his chummy relationship with the press, Hitchcock constantly denigrated his producer (perhaps the 'O' that stands for nothing in the middle of Cary Grant's name in *North by Northwest* is a last jibe at Selznick, who adopted a similarly empty middle initial). Forever financially insecure as well as overweight, Hitchcock would grumble ('Fund for Starving Hitchcocks') at the occasional bonuses Selznick would give him out of the large profits he made from loaning the director out to other studios. Perhaps the real fascination of this clash of the titans story is how similar Hitchcock and Selznick could be (in their obsessiveness over detail and their need for control) while operating out of such different personalities and to such different ends: Selznick expansive, workaholic, Benzedrine-powered, throwing memoranda 'at a chaos he sometimes helped to create'; Hitchcock ordered, repressed, self-confessedly lazy, exemplifying 'the formation of boundaries, the abridgment of freedom, and the limits of opportunity, all anathema to Selznick but the essence of Hitchcock's best work.'

RICHARD COMBS

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in his early incarnation as red-baiter, couldn't understand why Hollywood didn't make more anti-communist films. The answer was that they bombed at the box-office, and that's bad capitalism.

But of course it's the Great Communicator who has demonstrated the true power of film, using lines from old movies not only to describe and endorse, but also to shape his foreign policy: 'Win this one for the Gipper'; 'Now I know what to do next time' (having seen *Rambo*); the 'Evil Empire' speech, courtesy of Darth Vader. The line that many thought the most appropriate, however—'Is this all of me?'—has not, up to now, been used.

That's not to say that the influence has all been one way: as Terry Christensen points out, the last years of Carter's administration and the first of Reagan's were quite hospitable to such productions as *Norma Rae*, *The China Syndrome*, *Reds*, *Missing* and *Under Fire*. Since the start of his second term, however, Reaganite foreign, if not social policy (the 'barnyard' trilogy, after all, slipped under the wire) has carried all before it in the movies, if not in Congress. Whereas *Strategic Air Command*, made at the height of the Cold War, stressed preparedness, *Top Gun*, *Rambo*, *Missing in Action*, *Red Dawn* and *Invasion USA* positively hiss belligerence. It is, indeed, on these recent movies that *Reel Politics* is most interesting.

Taking as his starting point Costa-Gavras' observation that, 'Esther Williams made the most political movies ever, because she showed a way of life that never was, or could be . . .' and acknowledging that the 'happy endings, individualistic solutions, faith in heroes and heroines, and emphasis on competition' of American movies 'are, broadly speaking, political', Terry Christensen then proceeds to ignore it, concentrating instead on those films having to do with 'politicians, elections, government, and the political process'. These films, he believes, constitute in themselves a genre, albeit one not sufficiently recognised.

But can political movies really be said to constitute a genre? They are, after all, as Christensen points out, wildly varied in form. They share few conventions; they do not look alike. And indeed the author himself doesn't stick strictly to his guns: films that have nothing to do with the political process as such—the Depression musicals, for example—are put in, while others, equally worthy of mention, are left out. Thus we do have *Gold Diggers of 1933*, but not Esther Williams; *Bonnie and*

Adjustments

REEL POLITICS
American Political Movies
from *The Birth of a Nation*
to *Platoon*

by Terry Christensen

Blackwell/£19.50

Ever since Woodrow Wilson called *The Birth of a Nation* 'like writing history with lightning', American presidents, at least, have recognised the political potential of the movies. FDR himself asked Warner Brothers to make the extraordinary *Mission to Moscow*; Richard Nixon,

BOOK REVIEWS

Clyde, but not *Dirty Harry*; First Blood, but only in passing Rocky.

And in truth Christensen makes little headway with his new genre over such well-known terrain as *The Birth of a Nation*, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (war is taken throughout to be part of the political genre), the social conscience and anti-fascist films of the 1930s and 40s and the anti-communist films of the 50s. It is only when he moves into the less well-trodden post-McCarthy era that certain formal configurations start to become more interesting.

In *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*, for example, James Stewart makes a typically Capraesque appeal to the people, but that message is suppressed. In the end, only the promptings of Claude Rains' conscience save the day. But while Jefferson Smith finally triumphs over the political machine, by the time of the same director's *State of the Union*, in 1948, Spencer Tracy finds he can only act with integrity by walking away from the business of politics altogether.

The system itself is rarely found wanting, of course; rather, adjustment is needed. And it is by codifying the variations of this adjustment that *Reel Politics* provides a useful barometer of relative belief in the American political process. Does the hero walk away from the business altogether (*Tracy in State of the Union*; Brando in *Viva Zapata!*; Fonda in *The Best Man*)? Or does he stay in spite of his conscience (as in *The Candidate*)? Is it just a case of a few bad apples that democracy can survive (*Advise and Consent*)? Or are the bad guys brought down not by the people, but by individual killers (*All the King's Men*, *A Lion Is in the Streets*)? (Or does the film actually endorse a crypto-fascist solution, as in *Gabriel Over The White House*?) How often is it 'the people' themselves who see through political chicanery? As Christensen remarks, 'the people', without a strong leader along FDR lines, are very rarely allowed to be the good guys in American film.

Judged by these criteria, the general tendency of American films has, not surprisingly, been to become more pessimistic about the political process. Or more sophisticated, depending on your point of view. Public taste, as Darryl Zanuck once remarked, is an ascending spiral. After the recent spate of gung-ho super-patriotism, will 'OZ' be vindicated by the return of a more thoughtful, less confident approach? Or will H. L. Mencken be proved right that 'no one ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public'?

DAVID JEFFCOCK

What's up, Duce?

DOING THEIR BIT:
Wartime American
Animated Short Films,
1939-1945
by Michael S. Shull
and David E. Wilt
McFarland/£29.95

In 1937 the *March of Time* received an Oscar for having 'revolutionised' the cinematic presentation of news. Within the industry, the award was far from universally popular. Telling people what was going on, grumbled an editorial in the *Motion Picture Herald*, was no part of the cinema's job. Rather, it should serve as 'the public's escape from the bitter realities, the anguishes, and the turmoil of life.'

Anything remotely resembling documentary had always been regarded by Hollywood with nervous hostility; film-makers like Flaherty and Lorentz found themselves marginalised or frozen out, and attempts to set up a Government Film Service were scuttled by the studios' lobby in Congress. As a result, when the US entered the Second World War, the movie propaganda machine had to be constructed more or less from scratch. In Britain, Grierson's disciples had flung themselves eagerly into everything from grand patriotic statements to succinct two-minute instructionals on blackouts, saving bathwater and kitchen waste for pigs. Hollywood, lacking the documentary input, improvised—often ingeniously—with what came to hand. Mainstream directors such as Huston, Ford, Capra and Wyler creamed off the more prestigious assignments; but much of the humbler task of exhorting, instructing and generally jollifying along the Home Front fell, incongruously enough, to the animation studios.

In *Doing Their Bit* Michael Shull and David Wilt have trawled through the thousand or so cartoon shorts produced for general release by the Hollywood animation units between January 1939 and September 1945, and come up with 271 (plus a handful of doubtfuls) containing 'war-related material'—which covers anything from out-and-out gung-ho propaganda to the most cursory gag about rubber shortage. By way of introduction, they include a brief chapter on US political animation of the First World War, and another on that of the 30s.

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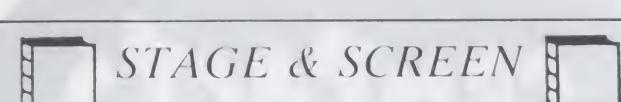
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BOOK REVIEWS

(owI), charged with monitoring Hollywood's contribution to the war effort, carried rather less clout than its un equivalent, the Ministry of Information, and not all the animation units took on the job with equal assiduity. The two that showed most enthusiasm were the creative front-runners of the period, Disney and Warner Bros.

Disney had got in on the act well before Pearl Harbor, producing pro-Allied cartoons for the National Film Board of Canada. The day after America entered the war, the studio undertook to supply the Navy Department with 20 aircraft identification films, known as the WEFT series. (Wings, Engine, Fuselage, Tail—but so often were the films sent back for correction that the acronym was recycled as Wrong Every Fucking Time.) *The New Spirit*, Disney's first propaganda film for home release, featured Donald Duck patriotically paying 'taxes to beat the Axis', and ran into a storm of protest over its \$80,000 cost. Disney was attacked in Congress as a war profiteer, and received abusive mail, much of it anti-semitic—apparently on the assumption that a studio boss must by definition be Jewish.

Undeterred, Disney kept at it. Minnie Mouse saved kitchen fat, Goofy joined the Navy, Pluto guarded gun emplacements, and Donald Duck, in the Oscar-winning *Der Fuehrer's Face*, became a citizen of the Reich—awaking from his nightmare to hug the Statue of Liberty. Characteristically, Disney often leavened the message with humour—Donald blows his top, Goofy screws up—but never hinted at any questioning of America's war aims.

Warners, as befitting the studio housing Friz Freleng, Chuck Jones, Bob Clampett and (until he moved to Metro in 1942) Tex Avery, took a more iconoclastic attitude to official ideology. In *Draftee Daffy*, the duck spouts bellicose fervour until his draft papers arrive, inducing abject panic, and Bugs Bunny (*Buckaroo Bugs*) cheerfully plunders Victory gardens for his carrot supply. Warners also threw in a lot more sexual ambiguity than Disney, or most other studios, would have dared. *The Wise Quacking Duck* has Daffy unzip his feathers for a fan dance, and in *Herr Meets Hare Bugs*—anticipating *What's Opera, Doc?*—vamps a mean Brünnhilde to Hermann Goering's Siegfried, besides getting to impersonate both Hitler and Stalin.

Much of the time, Hitler, Mussolini and Co simply took over from Elmer Fudd and the Big Bad Wolf as resident fall-guys in the cartoon world's endemic

mayhem, often being further assimilated by appearing as animals. Thus Hitler shows up as a wolf or a vulture, Mussolini as a gorilla or a duck (in Warners' farmyard fable *The Ducktators*) and any number of Japanese as buck-toothed monkeys. (The blatant racism of many wartime cartoons largely keeps them off today's screens.) Even Popeye, when not succouring the Allies (*Spinach for Britain*), managed to redirect his hostility from Pluto to the Japanese Navy. 'The cartoon studios,' Shull and Wilt observe approvingly, 'were truly "Doing Their Bit".'

So they were—in intention, at any rate. It's tempting to wonder, though, just what the effect was on audiences to see the Axis leaders transformed into cartoon animal villains. After all, the characteristics of the animated baddies, the Toms and Wile E. Coyotes, are consistent enough. First, they never do any real, lasting damage. Second, they're indestructible: exploded, bisected, steamrollered, they bounce right back in the next frame. (In *Russian Rhapsody*, Hitler resurrects from his grave for a quick song-and-dance act.) Third, they're perversely endearing; as Chuck Jones points out, the appeal of the *Road Runner* series is that most of us are rooting for the Coyote. In Tex Avery's spirited *Three Little Pigs* spoof for MGM, *Blitz Wolf*, Adolf Wolf displays a swashbuckling panache far more engaging than anything the real Adolf could muster. Image and intention seem to be subtly at variance.

Such speculations hardly trouble Shull and Wilt, who mostly content themselves with a sober trudge through the material. They do, however, quote the occasional revealing comment from the owI, which observed of the appallingly racist Popeye number, *You're a Sap, Mr Jap*, that 'it laughs at the enemy in such a way as to discredit their real danger.' And *Slay It with Flowers*, a witless Fox-and-Crow effort from Columbia, elicited the exasperated remark, 'In view of the present shortage of film, this cartoon is an irresponsible waste of footage.'

By far the most valuable (and largest) part of the book is its filmography: 90 pages listing all 271 films, complete with credits and plot summaries, and laced with enough critical comment to indicate which rarities are worth tracking down. The only thing missing is a glossary. If you can't remember, or never knew, what it meant to be 'rated 4-F', or to hold an 'A-card', this book isn't about to tell you. Still, as Bugs remarked, you can't have everything.

PHILIP KEMP

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Scanning and Panning

SIR.—John Belton's article on the pernicious practice of scanning and panning 'Scope format films for television (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1987/88) is much to be welcomed.

In this country, a particularly unappealing form of pseudo-intellectual prejudice seems to determine whether or not a film is scanned. Thus, films from Hollywood are usually scanned, even if they were made in what Martin Scorsese very correctly describes as the 'high Scope era', and even if scheduled in specialist slots such as the BBC's Film Club. Two victims in 1987 were Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Bitter Victory*. In the case of the latter, it was rather ironic that the BBC thus undermined their own achievement in finding a substantially more complete print than that shown in recent years at the NFT. (Of course *Bitter Victory*, though by a Hollywood director, is not in any real sense a Hollywood film.)

Probably no director was more sensitive than Ray to the range of compositional possibilities opened up by the 'Scope frame, and it is sad that British TV executives compel their audiences to view his films 'largely in terms of plot, character and overall narrative', whereas many European directors less influenced by the traditions of art history and less welcoming and sensitive to the visual potential of 'Scope have their work shown in full.

I am always surprised that listings magazines like *Time Out* and *City Limits* have not taken this issue on board; if they were to indicate whether films were scheduled for transmission in full, or whether a '50 per cent' version had been scheduled, it might produce some interesting results. Still, there are so many things they ought to do and don't: for example, indicating which cinemas normally project films in focus; which cinemas show films shot at 1.33:1 in the correct aspect ratio, and so on.

Yours faithfully,
JAMES LEAHY
London EC2

Cry Freedom

SIR.—I am pained by Anthony Sampson's description of the American civil rights movement in 'Attenborough's Biko' (Winter 1987/88).

In his review Sampson states, 'The opening sequence of the destruction of the shacktown at Crossroads, and the concluding sequence of the shooting of schoolchildren at Soweto, remain powerful reminders of the fundamental background of violence

and the lack of human rights—which has no real parallel in the American history of the civil rights movement.'

As I read it I am at once reminded that twenty years ago to the day Martin Luther King, Jr was shot to death in Memphis, Tennessee. During our history, one embracing slavery, apartheid, and racial segregation for two centuries, we saw thousands of lynchings, the execution of the Scottsboro Seven, violent shootings at Jackson State, the bloody horror at Selma . . . and the list goes on. For each of the numerous names listed at the end of *Cry Freedom*, ten Black Americans have died by execution . . .

There are, to put it simply, enormous parallels in American history to the background of violence and lack of human rights in South Africa. This is at the root of why America has little willingness to confront this horrendous system of racial hatred. To deny this is very American in its attitude—as Americans too, like Anthony Sampson, chose to forget history as often as it is possible and convenient.

Black Americans and the majority population of South Africa have long suffered under this tyranny of comfortable ignorance.

Yours faithfully,
ROBB A. MITCHELL
Paris/Ram Productions
Minneapolis

Conrad Veidt

SIR.—I would be most grateful for help from your readers in finding research material on the actor Conrad Veidt (1893-1943). I would appreciate hearing from fans, colleagues, friends, or otherwise who have anecdotes, personal reminiscences, letters, photographs, clippings, or other material for a biography.

Please contact me at: 100 Belmont Place, Staten Island, NY 10301.

Yours faithfully,
PATRICIA WILKS BATTLE

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MARGARET DICKINSON is co-author with Sarah Street of BFI Publishing's *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84*, at present living in Holland . . . TERRY DOYLE is a Senior Producer, BBC Television Continuing Education Department . . . THERESA FITZGERALD is a writer and freelance media journalist, working on a book about British TV thrillers . . . DAVID JEFFCOCK has worked at the BBC as studio director and producer on *Film 83/84/85* and for three episodes of *Talking Pictures* . . . JAMES PRICE is a book publisher.

SYLVIA LOEB

Sylvia Loeb, *SIGHT AND SOUND*'s editorial secretary, retired in June. The editors will miss her greatly; so, we suspect, will many of our contributors and correspondents around the world. Sylvia joined the BFI soon after the war. She worked first in the then tiny Information Department, was with *SIGHT AND SOUND* in 1949, when a new director, Denis Forman, appointed a new editor, Gavin Lambert, to transform the magazine, and later went to the Stills Library. She made off in the 50s to the late *Picturegoer* (answering readers' queries), but was

soon back keeping BFI Periodicals in order.

To Sylvia, cinema has always been the tenth muse. Music (opera in particular) and painting rank far higher in her personal pantheon. But she likes fiercely what she likes (Resnais mostly; Rohmer sometimes; John Gielgud always). An exemplary typist, still preferring an aged Adler, she has been a stickler for sense; someone to whom it was difficult to dictate a sloppy sentence or an unchecked reference. Without her, the *SIGHT AND SOUND* office is going to be a duller, if more decorous place. We all wish her a much-travelled retirement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THE CHILDREN'S FILM UNIT for *Under the Bed* crew.

NATIONAL FILM DEV CORP/ CHANNEL 4/CADRAGE for *Salaam Bombay!*

FILM POLSKI for *Thou Shalt Not Kill*.

PER HOLST FILM PRODUCTION/ SWEDISH/DANISH FILM INSTITUTES for *Pelle the Conqueror*.

ORION PICTURES INTERNATIONAL for *Hotel Terminus*.

XI-AN for *Red Sorghum*.

KATUJINDO CINEMA for *Abracadabra*.

CHERDALAI PRODUCTIONS for *The Gem from the Deep*.

FIVE STARS for *Butterfly and Flowers*.

POONSAAU PRODUCTIONS for *Khamsing*.

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FRANCISCO FILM FESTIVAL for *The Swimmer*.

GREAT BRITAIN-USSR ASSOCIATION/ JOHN ROBERTS for photographs of Soviet television delegation in England.

SOVEXPORT for *The Cold Summer of 1953*.

ASSOCIATED PRESS for 1988 Oscars photographs of Sean Connery, Cher, *The Last Emperor* group.

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CINEMATHEQUE FRANCAISE for photograph of Paris opening of British film season.

MOWELFUND FILM INSTITUTE for Filipino films.

IAN CHRISTIE for Eisenstein portraits, photographs of Eisenstein's grave, Raul Ruiz.

LES PRODUCTIONS LA FETE for *Red Ridinghood 2000*.

RAYMOND RED for photographs of Nick Deocampo, Raymond Red.

BBC/RADIO TIMES/LU JEFFERY for *A Very Peculiar Practice*.

BBC for *Talking Heads*.

BFI PRODUCTION for *Distant Voices, Still Lives*.

STEPHEN BOTTOMORE/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS for *Shoot the Chutes, Taking President McKinley's Body from Train*.

NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, Dewsbury Fire Brigade, Salvaging a Steamroller, The Front*, photographs of Jacques and Pierre Prévert, Lino Brocka, Samuel Fuller, Eisenstein self-portraits, sketches, *Bezhin Meadow* location shots; portrait of Vera Yanukova.

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ON NOW

● DEATH OF A SALESMAN

(*Artificial Eye*)

Defiantly stagey production of the Arthur Miller warhorse exulting in its own larger-than-life performances and plywood sets. Dustin Hoffman's theatrically acclaimed Willy Loman is preserved for posterity, but as a star turn, lacking the simplicity Fredric March brought to the same role in the Laslo Benedek version of 1952. Benedek aimed always for cinematic effects, through naturalistic acting and a Wellesian use of chiaroscuro. And with Franz Planer he pioneered a photographic technique using light alone to show past and present in the same shot. Volker Schlöndorff's made-for-TV remake is altogether less imaginative—a film that recreates in Michael Ballhaus' foursquare cinematography the experience of sitting in a seat in the stalls. Sad that Miller's play, newish and up-for-grabs in Benedek's day, should have acquired, along with its classic status, a hands-off quality for modern filmmakers. Fine supporting performances from the dependable John Malkovich and Charles Durning but they can't compensate for Schlöndorff's over-reverential approach.

● LONG LIVE THE LADY!

(*Artificial Eye*)

In a setting fit for Nosferatu, a group of teenagers is employed to wait on table at a banquet being held in a mountain fastness for luminaries from the arts and sciences. Ermanno Olmi elides a familiar comedy of manners—as the bewildered kids are inducted into the increasingly bizarre protocol of the occasion—with intimations of the *fantastique*. Nosferatu turns out to be the long-lived lady, who presides over the occasion from behind veils that can't disguise a startling resemblance to the monstrous fish that is the meal's centrepiece. Angels as well as demons attend the reveries of a bespectacled boy who is the most mooncalf-like of the lackeys, and childlike innocence and fancied evil eventually prove compatible playmates. A delicate mixture, occasionally attenuated but more often delightful. (Marco Esposito, Simone Dalla Rosa.)

● THE PERFECT MURDER

(*Enterprise*)

A Swedish criminologist is introduced to the madcap world of Bombay CID by the indomitable Insp Ghote (Naseeruddin Shah). Who knocked Mr Perfect on the head? The trail of the would-be killer of an obese tycoon's sticklike secretary careens through

several of the city's exotic, and to western eyes unfamiliar byways (camera Walter Lassally) and, in this H. R. F. Keating adaptation, is the exuberant excuse for a large helping of broad Indian parody. Matters sharpen up considerably, however, with the appearance of the imperishable Madhur Jaffrey, as the Hindu matriarch outraged at Mr P's Parsee mumbo-jumbo, and Ratna Pathak Shah, as Ghote's most submissive wife. A leafy Merchant Ivory offshoot. (Director, Zafar Hai.)

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY

(*UIP*)

Michael J. Fox makes an unexpectedly credible stab at the part of a pill-popping, vodka-swilling would-be novelist, but this mishmash of satirical yuppie comedy and mawkish Freudian melodrama, directed with sub-60s frenzy, rapidly goes beyond the pale. (Kiefer Sutherland, Phoebe Cates; director, James Bridges.)

THE COUCH TRIP

(*Rank*)

Michael Ritchie's best film of the 80s, but still not up to his early work. Dan Aykroyd is a mental patient who takes the place of a pop psychologist in Beverly Hills and does a lot of good while bilking his employers. It might have stood a chance as a simple vehicle for Aykroyd, but the film yanks in an unexpectedly irritating Walter Matthau for a one-scene cameo that gets extended throughout the picture.

HAIRSPRAY

(*Vestron*)

Set in the early 60s and re-creating the cult surrounding a Maryland music TV show, this might seem less a John Waters project than something from Baltimore's other resident director, Barry Levinson. However, despite the presence of Divine and such camp followers as Sonny Bono, Debbie Harry and Pia Zadora, the film turns out to be a wholly charming re-creation of the ambience of the period's Frankie and Annette musicals. It has touches of Waters' trademark crudity, but is technically accomplished and demonstrates a pleasing, gentle wit.

THE HOUSE ON CARROLL STREET

(*Rank*)

Evocative 1951 setting gives an extra plus to an ingenious mystery tale, Hitchcockian in conception but thankfully free of *hommages*, with Kelly McGillis as HUAC victim stumbling on to a conspiracy (in which, of course, her chief persecutor proves to be implicated) for smuggling Nazi war criminals into the US. (Jeff Daniels, Mandy Patinkin, Jessica Tandy; director, Peter Yates.)

THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR

(*UIP*)

A Chicano farmer illegally irrigates his family beanfield and the whole community is in uproar. An impeccably liberal movie that sentimentalises its

Mexican-Americans to demeaning effect, and throws away every dramatic possibility with its whimsical bonhomie. A largely Hispanic cast is bolstered for the box-office with a few Anglo 'names'. (Ruben Blades, Sonia Braga, John Heard, Christopher Walken, Melanie Griffith; director, Robert Redford.)

THE MONSTER SQUAD

(*Rank*)

A pack of famous ghouls converge on a small town for a reign of universal Evil, and only the local teenage monster fans can stop them. An untouted gem, with high-tech special effects in the service of an affectionate re-creation of the classical gothics of Hammer and Universal, and a far less annoying gang of kid heroes than *The Goonies* or *The Lost Boys*. (Duncan Regehr, Stephen Macht; director, Fred Dekker.)

THE POINTSMAN

(*Vestron*)

A Dutch art movie shot in Scotland about the odd relationship between a stranded French-speaking passenger (Stéphane Escoffier) and the nearly mute, clownish pointsman (Jim van der Woude) of an isolated railway siding. Crystal clear photography and a murky script add up to a chilly, unapproachable movie with a few moments of quirky charm. (Director, Jos Stelling.)

THE ROSARY MURDERS

(*Virgin*)

A serial killer is offing Catholic priests and nuns, not on general principle but because the Church interfered with his sexual proclivities. A sluggish investigation by priest (Donald Sutherland) and reporter (Belinda Bauer) is made more so by their coy not-quite indulgence in the obligatory romance. (Charles Durning; director, Fred Walton.)

SACRIFICED YOUTH

(*Artificial Eye*)

Zhang Nuanxin's fascinatingly ambivalent Chinese drama set amid the sarong culture of the Dai minority people. Her film is both a lament for the educational opportunities lost by the rustication of intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution and a celebration of the humanity they discovered as a result. An unprecedented attack on the puritanism of China's numerically dominant Han people and a hymn to the hedonism of the ethnic minorities, admirably mirrored in a lush photographic style.

SAIGON

(*UKFD*)

Willem Dafoe of *Platoon* and Gregory Hines of *Running Scared* get together to combine elements of both films, as a salt-and-pepper team of jokester military policemen in Saigon in 1968, going after a psycho army officer who has been murdering Vietnamese prostitutes. Three-quarters of a good thriller, with Scott Glenn as a magnificently crazed suspect, but the home stretch is an embarrassing hash. (Fred Ward, Amanda Pays; director, Christopher Crowe.)

SALOME'S LAST DANCE

(*Vestron*)

In a Victorian brothel, the friends of Oscar Wilde (Nickolas Grace) mount a production of the banned *Salome* to please the author. Ken Russell's idiosyncratic vision of what was fairly precious in the first place involves mistimed knockabout and generally misguided camp. (Stratford Johns, Glenda Jackson.)

SEPTEMBER

(*Rank*)

Woody Allen in unremittingly non-comic mood with a chamber drama entirely set in a Vermont country retreat full to bursting with emotional frustration. Verging on excessive self-consciousness, but ultimately a good deal more satisfying than *Interiors* by virtue of the demotic undercurrents lurking beneath the austere, if theatrically formal surface. (Mia Farrow, Diane Wiest, Denholm Elliott, Elaine Stritch.)

STARLIGHT HOTEL

(*Recorded Releasing*)

Depression drifter gets lumbered with the companionship of a 13-year-old girl in what sometimes resembles a Kiwi version of *Paper Moon*. Appealing after a lightweight, soft-centred fashion, though the treatment lacks the distinctiveness of the director's earlier *The Scarecrow*. (Greer Robson, Peter Phelps; director, Sam Pillsbury.)

SWITCHING CHANNELS

(*Rank*)

A doomed attempt to remake *His Girl Friday* that works well enough if expectations are down-scaled from Cary Grant to Burt Reynolds. The story is lamely adapted to a TV news milieu, and somehow Kathleen Turner in the Rosalind Russell role gets upstaged by Christopher Reeve's Ralph Bellamy and a succession of amusing turns from reliable supporting players such as Ned Beatty and Henry Gibson. (Director, Ted Kotcheff.)

THROW MOMMA FROM THE TRAIN

(*Rank*)

Strangers on a Train played for broader laughs than Hitchcock's as Danny DeVito cooks up a family plot to murder Billy Crystal's thieving ex-wife in exchange for his own notorious mother. With Anne Ramsey's gross parody of a Hitchcock matriarch it's downhill all the way, but the real saboteur is DeVito. As fledgling director, he is the wrong man to work variations on a sufficiently rich and strange theme.

TRACK 29

(*Recorded Releasing*)

A Dennis Potter play given the Nicolas Roeg treatment proves a combustible and often hilarious mixture—fear and loathing in North Carolina, Theresa Russell nagging at her childlessness, baby who fell to earth Gary Oldman craving to return to the womb, and a rally of model-train fanatics that's like a *coup d'état*. Freud, in the end, is not always adequate underpinning for the flash and fury. (Christopher Lloyd.)

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